A Chequered Destiny

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A Chequered Destiny.

BY

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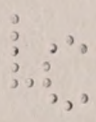
AUTHOR OF

EFIESTA, OR THE CASTLE OF SILENCE. NEDETTE, THE ARCADIAN MAID. REGINALD; OR A FISHERMAN'S LUCK. AFTER MANY DAYS AND OTHER STORIES. THOMPSON, THE DETECTIVE. MUSINGS OF MORN. PARNASSIAN NICHES. THE DESCHANOS. BRAIN RAMBLES.



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A CHEQUERED DESTINY.

CHAPTER I.

KING CHARLES' MEN-OF-WAR IN PORT.

THE ancient town of Dantima was a quaint spot of earth where time crystalized the past and obliterated the present from the calendar of the centuries. Change and decay touched it with a leniency that was marvelous. Its existence dated from the Norman invasion. The paved streets and solidly built houses still nestled within its massive walls.

Generation succeeded generation. Thus they preserved the manners and customs of the invaders. Strange to relate, the population never increased or decreased. If a child was born an adult died. The ebbs and flows of human existence were as changeless as the seasons.

Cut off from the world by a mysterious power, they married and intermarried till a uniform resemblance in body and feature made distinct personality a very difficult undertaking.

The burg was doomed to perpetual isolation. The weird tales embellished by time (with all of the exaggerated touches of superstition) became so many grim sentinels whose ceaseless vigils blighted the fairest of nature's scenes. The Devil's Elbow was a conspicuous landmark. It was an abrupt angle of an isolated mountain spur, whose top was crowned by a half-ruined cottage perched skyward, and hidden among the giant trees.

The citizens feared and hated the ghostly spot with an intense aversion fully equal to his satanic majesty's dislike for holy water. It was a distributing point where the spectral world held undisputed sway, much to the detriment of Dantima.

The burgomaster sold the undesirable property to persons from London for a good round sum. For this reason expectation was on tiptoe. The tangled web of uncertainty created a feverish condition of anxiety among the little groups that gathered on the corners of the Cathedral Square.

The ruined cottage was an object of considerable interest to the peaceful residents, because its forest-crowned top was environed by a fatal charm more potent than the spell of an enchantress. Far out to sea its unholy lights were visible. For this reason sailors cleared the point where lights could be seen flickering and flaring above the tall tree tops.

The house was effectually concealed from the terror-stricken glances which were contented to allow space and a very deep-wooded ravine to separate them from these heights, where death's carnival and the dance of skeletons made night a revelry for the dead.

The location was exceptionally picturesque. Upon the landward side a rugged rocky glen sloped abruptly towards the town, whose precipitous sides had been walled half way up to make a snug harbor for vessels that sailed in with the tide. Ancient gnarled oak trees with twisted roots swayed at modest angles from the sides of the cliff. Upon the seaward side of the projecting spur a perpendicular wall of rock made the cottage a conspicuous landmark that guided ships into the land-locked bay.

There was a steep pathway that wound among the

dense foliage up to the cottage gate. At the foot of this path a crystal spring gurgled from beneath the hill, where a rough hewn stone cross was almost concealed by the entrance to a roomy grotto, where a painted statue of the Virgin Mary freshened the sombreness of the interior.

Smoke curled gracefully from the tall chimney of the haunted house. This fact increased the wonderment in Dantima. What means had been used to furnish the inmates with the comforts of life? Keen eyes guarded every avenue of approach. The foiled watchers contented themselves with a vast amount of futile speculation, all of which was dispelled when a half-witted boy of fifteen summers roamed at will through the silent streets of Dantima. He was accompanied by a very large and ferocious wolf dog. The boy had but one answer to the dozen of idle questions that greeted him at every turn of the square, and this was an idiotic stare that left nothing to be desired in the way of a reply.

The burghers only shook their heads with a gravity that was ludicrous, and paid no further attention to the lad as he gazed in stupid wonder at the ancient Custom House, and wandered through the gloomy rooms, especially those that contained unredeemed plunder of every description upon which no duty had ever been paid, thereby cheating the King's exchequer of various sums that Father Time had receipted in full by death or otherwise.

Sometimes the half-witted lad accompanied his sister to the great Cathedral of Dantima that occupied the centre of the square. When she was safely within its massive walls her soulful brown eyes never wandered from her devotions, as she repeated each Hail Mary, and Pater Noster on her rosary with that devotion that was cradled in faith.

The majestic altar that time embellished with relics from a score of shrines never reflected its colored shadows upon a more exquisite face. When her devotions were ended she would timidly retrace her steps through the sombre streets and pass out of the massive postern gate, walk briskly across the glen, climb the steep pathway, and draw a long breath, thankful for the freedom the great forest offered her; thankful to be free from the boorish glances that made these visits a duty.

The widow seldom ventured within the city's gate. It was through Father Leonard's persuasion that she came. He read her letters thoughtfully and dismissed her with his blessing. She was always closely veiled; the eyes that peered through her modesty, followed her retreating figure with looks that boded no good for the widow and her children.

As their persons became more familiar to the burghers, and the girl and boy mingled with the children of the ancient town, the old quietness settled upon the port, a quietness that was measured by generations. The dwellers on the cliff, in the opinion of these roundheads, were covenanters with the devil. The small amount of human charity they (the commoners) possessed extended no further than their hat-brims.

One fine day the peaceful repose of Dantima was rudely broken. The booming of cannon reverberated through the paved streets; the window panes rattled with an ominous sound that filled the inhabitants with alarm. Soon a disorderly throng crowded the pier. The anxious eyes that were shaded by steeple-crowned hats, gazed curiously at two of His Majesty's men-of-war as they rounded the narrows and dropped anchor in the bay.

The custom-house officer became a target for a hundred

questions, all of which were answered by a ferocious snarl: "God wot but His Majesty's officer is not beholden to answer thy queries."

This self-important dignitary was Falstaffian in size; consequently no shot ever went amiss. His ponderocity had grown gray in the King's service. At least this assertion was proven by the parchment that adorned the dingy walls. There was a faint suspicion that time alone had not faded the King's authority; perhaps the fumes of tobacco smoke were potent factors in its discoloration.

When the cannons boomed through the massive building his portly person was comfortably filling a leathern arm chair; both of his legs were extended in a helpless position. His loud-smelling pipe was on the floor at his side. Sleep stole his overfed sense that was of a very inferior quality. The echoes of the guns sounded with startling distinctness through the wide halls. With an effort he aroused his dormant faculties and sat upright.

"Rudolf! Rudolf! where art thou? thou knave. Out upon thee for a loiterer!"

At this call, a tall, limber specimen of overgrown humanity ambled to the chair, and with an angular jerking movement raised his hand to his forehead with the palm to the front, evidently this motion was intended for a formal salute.

"Rudolf, what was that strange noise outside? How it startled me."

"Two of the King's warships are anchored off the fourth pier."

"Thou sayest so, Rudolf. When was the last port entry?"

"Don't know; go see."

With an altogether the clerk opened a heavy brass-

bound record book, and for a few moments was lost in the investigation.

"Three years to-morrow, sir, and not a day less."

"Rudolf, do we owe the King aught? I like not the coming of these war dogs. There is trouble in the air."

"Don't know, sir; will see."

"Also, see how much we have to our credit, not including His Majesty's part."

"Sir, we lack ten pounds of having a penny."

"Rudolf, thy report is very satisfactory. Thou canst go."

"Come back! come back! How didst thou say we stood?"

Rudolf repeated what he had already remarked, and started for the harbor.

"Stay! Rudolf, give me the ten pounds. Keep the penny. A fair divide, is it not, Rudolf. Do not mention how liberal I have been."

"Sir, thou dost not understand."

"Silence! Do as I tell thee. No words with a superior officer. Am I not in good King Charles' service? I understand my business, as thou must know."

The discomfited accountant went sullenly over his figures, yet he could not make two and two one hundred. Fortunately a deputation of Dantima's citizens entered the room and thus relieved the painful embarrassment.

"Sir, as an officer of the King, thou canst tell us why the war ships are in port? Here have we lived in peace for ten generations fearing God and caring for no man. There is trouble for the hatching. The widow moved into the devil's dance house, and now, close upon the heels of her arrival, our ungodly ruler has sent his vessels here."

"Out upon thee for a set of graceless knaves! Who are ye? that thee should call good King Charles to a reckoning? Or is it that thy own affairs do suffer by over-inquisitiveness, that makes Dantima a pest-house of senseless gossip."

"But, sir, as burghers——"

"Silence! I understand my duties well. Does the King's royal seal mean nothing, as it hangs from yonder wall?"

The deputation retired in confusion; when it passed out of the tall archway that faced the pier, the heavy frame of custom collector was shaken by a quiet chuckle, as he muttered: "God wot but a custodian of his Majesty's good pounds is not obliged to tell what he does not know."

Turning in his seat he saw Nattie, the half-witted boy, standing just outside the entrance.

"Nattie, my lad, don't go away, I may need thee. I will want thee to take a message to the ships."

"I will be within call, sir."

"At the same time, my boy, circulate the report that the men-of-war in port were ordered here by my command." He was chagrined that good King Charles had omitted to inform him of this mysterious movement of state policy.

This ancient semblance of authority drained his half gallon of ale, filled his pipe and dozed peacefully, while the widow's son was as usual overhauling piles of unclaimed plunder.

Package after package found its way to the haunted house. Bundles of letters, clothing, souvenirs, all musty with age, passed under the vigilant eyes of mother and daughter. The wrappings were carefully replaced. Then

the relics of other years were returned to the Custom House.

Darkness and the tolling of the curfew bell warned Nattie that the ponderous city gate would soon be closed. Night had no terrors for this brave boy who wandered at will through the solemn glen. The large wolfish hound was his only companion. As they prowled through the underbrush the dog would rub his cold nose upon the lad's outstretched hand. The blazing-eyed owls would welcome both with a softer "Too hoo"; thus boy and dog gained a knowledge of woodcraft that would be such a safeguard as secrecy required.

CHAPTER II.

THE KING'S MESSENGER AND HIS FOOLISH WAGER.

THE smoke of His Majesty's guns had hardly drifted away to the windward when the staid burgesses gathered in small groups along the narrow sidewalks to confront a situation that was grave even to seriousness. "The King's messenger," they whispered, as they stood at a respectful distance and eyed the cavalier as he dismounted from his tired steed, whose gaudy and rich trappings were powdered with the dust of the road. The young nobleman alighted with some stiffness of his shapely legs. He gave his high buff leathern boot casings several sharp raps with his open palm and looked inquiringly around.

He was a young man of commanding appearance. His stout and well-knit frame was adorned by a slashed doublet and leggings. His features were regular and handsome, although a trace of dissipation betrayed a too close companionship with the King's wine flagons. His devil-may-care air and bold, fearless bearing betokened that he was a soldier of fortune. A jeweled-hilted sword swung lightly to his belt; the straight, well-tempered blade, with its keen edge and needle point, was a dangerous weapon in such hands.

He stood for a moment and with thoughtful glances surveyed the crowd that closed in on horse and rider. He threw the rein over his arm just as the group respectfully opened a passageway for him. Thus he passed through the massive gateway.

He walked with difficulty. The long ride cramped his limbs. The rough stone pavement over which he moved

gave a tilt to the high heels of his boots that was painful. The musical jingle of his gold spurs and the sharp ring of his horse's shoes sounded strangely as they echoed from wall to wall. When he reached the hostlery the throng pressed so closely that he could neither advance nor retreat.

"Give way, good people! God wot but it is an ill-mannered reception to one that comes from thy King. Give back, I say! ere I prick thee sharply with this good sword. Out upon thee for a set of ill-bred knaves!"

The crowd opened in front and closed behind him, while he turned his good steed over to the hostler and seated himself at one of the tables, where he munched the hard cheese and brown bread, which he washed down with copious draughts of ale.

One Dantimite made bold to enter the inn (without saying so much as "By your leave, sir"). He seated himself on the opposite side of the table. This movement was unnoticed because the cavalier was smiling good-naturedly at the faces that made a curious picture because of the strange resemblance one to another. It seemed to the tired traveler that they had been cast in the same mould. He was thus dreaming when the voice of his companion aroused him from this abstraction.

"Thou hast ridden hard, sir cavalier. Thy dust-bespattered garments and jaded steed bespeak the length of thy journey. Mayhap it is from London that thou camest?"

"I tell thee, good burgher, that some roads are long and some roads are short. All are long until thou reachest the end; with no company but one's thought they double in the distance."

"Who is yon damsel?" the messenger quickly asked. "She is fair to look upon. By our lady, King Charles'

court boasts not of such beauty. I mean the one that now skirts the throng and moves to the cathedral."

"Come, good sir cavalier, thy question deserves a boorish answer; yet will I tell thee of the maiden that liveth upon the Devil's Elbow. Flesh and blood that consort with the evil one are little to Dantima's liking. The foul fiend seize them and all such. The signs of unsettled times are in yon baleful height, where the tree tops do glow with pale tongues of fire."

"Tush, man! An idle tale for a yet more idle hour. Yon maiden's sweet face bespeaks a gentle birth; else are Dantima's girls fairer for the wooing. The very streets seem brighter when she is abroad."

"It is the foul witch's spell that binds thy better sense. Have a care, I tell thee; her eyes will bewitch thee. The foul fiend will do thee harm and the devil will get thy soul."

"Tush, again, I say! I heed not such foolish lore. I fear no man or the devil. Would that her pretty eyes would but rest upon me for a moment. One soft glance would be worth a world of scarecrows."

"Thou art over bold of speech, sir cavalier. I will wager a gallon of Mother Shipley's best brewing that with all thy brave speech thou canst not hold thy own a single hour against the fearful hordes that nightly revel in yon old rookery."

"By our good King Charles, I will double the wager. One place to sleep is as good as another. Hard riding and rugged roads make slumber a welcome neighbor. Bethink thee, good burgher, I speak betimes, that which I bespeak may not be to the maiden's liking."

"Why, then, good sir, the wager counteth for naught."

"The prospect for a night's sojourn in this dingy inn

seemeth but a poor promise for the morrow. I pray to our lady that the damsel may look kindly on my petition."

"Bestir thee, sir, the maiden cometh this way. If thy comely face wins not the day then are such vanities worthless."

The courtier straightened his cramped legs and pushed back the long hair that almost concealed his features, and moved to the entrance just in time to stand face to face with Florette, the widow's only daughter.

"I prithee pardon, lady, I would not be over bold in rudely addressing thee; if it smacketh of discourtesy I cry thee mercy." He doffed his broad-brimmed cavalier hat till the long plumes trailed on the pavement, and a wealth of curls fell loosely upon his broad shoulders.

A surprised flush spread quickly over her face as she noted the gentle bearing of this stranger, and her speech came soft and low as she replied:

"Gentle sir, the mercy is granted. What is thy request?"

"The right of hospitality for a single night."

"Hast thou heard the strange lore that runneth back through centuries? Bethink thee well ere thou makest answer."

"One night will not make or mar the fortunes of a life. I will be miles hence ere the morrow's sun has set."

"Nay, nay! sir, I see that thou art of gentle birth. I wot not why it should be thy wish to measure swords with shadows. Since desire is stronger than reason, I will say thee yea upon one condition."

"Name the condition, lady; I swear by my knightly spurs, by my manhood's honor, by the most sacred thing on earth, that thy wishes shall be respected."

"It is this," the damsel replied, "that the bold heart and

quick eye will never betray the rights of hospitality to injure the persons or property of those who extend a welcome."

"Thou hast my knightly word."

"My brother will guide thee through the glen."

When the maiden passed from sight this soldier of fortune replaced his broad-brimmed hat and stood as if rooted to the spot. Strange thoughts filled his mind, which the pressure of the crowd soon scattered. He advanced a hundred paces and stood intently gazing at the clear sky with a fixedness that quickly drew idlers around him. Scores of eyes were turned heavenward, impelled by that resistless force that governs the human race.

Unobserved the messenger moved rapidly to the rear of the Cathedral, thence to the Custom House, where he delivered a sealed package to the revenue officer, for which package the King's messenger received a receipt.

"God wot, Sir Jasper, but it is a welcome sight to see one who comes from His Majesty. I say thrice a good day to thee, and the best of the King's wine cellar shall be thine. Mother Shipley's best is but a sorry lodging for one in thy position. I owe my sovereign this courtesy. Thou canst not say me nay in the King's good name."

"Rudolf! Rudolf! Some wine from the vault in the north wing, with the seal as old as time!"

Sir Jasper looked curiously at the odd figure that brought three dark bottles and some glasses, but remained silent while the liquid gurgled a pleasing sound.

"Drink, Sir Jasper. Such wine is not to be had for the asking."

"The wine is excellent," Sir Jasper remarked. "My blood circulates with the vigor of youth. The ale, cheese and brown bread will not be ghosts to haunt my nightly

dreams. Thou art of good understanding. The King's wine flagons hold no better."

"Knowest thou aught that these dispatches contain?" The revenue officer asked this question with a careful consideration that diplomacy required, because the wine failed to produce the effect desired.

"Do not the parchments tell thee? Where is thy vision, good friend? The hand of the King's scribe is bold. Thou hast thy orders. Obey them."

Nattie drew near to the King's messenger and sang with a peculiar drawl: "The owls hoot, the ban-dog bays, and the witches croon their chants always."

"Well, my lad, is the time up?"

"Stay, Sir Jasper, what folly besets thee?"

"A whim and my love for adventure."

"That will cost thee all thy peace of mind in the years that are bright with future promise."

The cavalier turned upon his heel and followed the lad out of the rear entrance of the gloomy building. As they sped along the silent streets Nattie whispered: "The way is clear. The curfew rang a good hour ago, and we have the postern gate to pass. I fear me the crusty attendant will not let down the bars."

When they stood before the massive gate the lights were out in the keeper's lodge. Their repeated knocks were unanswered. The cavalier rapped sharply with the hilt of his sword on the oaken door and repeated in a clear tone of voice: "Open in the King's name!"

The effect was magical. The great door swung on its hinges and the belated persons passed out into the darkness of the woods.

"Keep close to me, my lad. God wot but the boulders are everywhere, and the gloom is dense. Thou hast the

eyes of the owl in thy head and thou art sure-footed as a hind."

When they reached the top of the hill Nattie repeated a low "Good night" and disappeared in the darkness around one angle of the house. The door was wide open. The entire place was at his disposal.

A strange feeling of loneliness crept into his mind, and yet he felt that he was not alone. The atmosphere oppressed him in a singular way. He wandered from room to room, where the pictures pleased him. The smaller objects that ornamented the apartment puzzled him, because they had a history with which he was familiar. Further than this he could not reason. In fact, he did not try to reason. He bravely resisted a human weakness that was so reprehensible in others.

He stood at the window that faced the sea. The fresh salt-ladened air blew upon his flushed face in a manner that was refreshing. He heard the water lapping the base of the cliff. It seemed to him that the sea was directly under him; that he was standing over a cavern. Then the musical chime of the Cathedral bell tolled the midnight hour.

He drew his sword and bent its polished blade till the point and hilt touched. He laughed loudly as he remarked: "Of what use is this good blade against the powers of darkness?" and with another hearty laugh he returned it to its scabbard.

His laugh had a thousand echoes. All the mocking devils of the air were at his elbow; yet no harm had come to him. He rushed to the windows for a breath of air, they were closed in his face. The doors slammed to and fro, and yet his brave soul was undaunted by the unearthly confusion of noises around him. He sang a verse

of an old love song that he had almost forgotten; yet it came back to him with all of the freshness of the long ago.

The song was suddenly cut short. A small female hand was placed over his mouth. A stinging blow on the head made him stagger and fall across a chair. He regained his feet. His sword was tossed about the room entirely at the mercy of unseen foes. The air was filled with groans and horrid maniac laughs. Hundreds of feet were tramping around him; the floor seemed to rock, to sway from side to side. He was thrown violently against the wall and stunned by a heavy blow.

When he recovered he was lying at the foot of the hill near the spring. His sword was by his side. A pair of feminine arms were around his neck. A musical voice whispered: "Come to me; thou art mine."

"Art thou suffering, sir?" The light of a pine torch in Nattie's hand added to the gruesomeness of the scene. As he bended over the prostrate man who lay on the damp, cool ground, the boy repeated the question in a louder tone of voice.

"Come, lad; help me to arise. I am in sore need of the leeches' craft. Easy; that will do. Bring me some water from the spring, else do my ears deceive me? Is that the maiden that standeth in the shadow of yon tree?"

"It is the maiden, good cavalier. Ah, woe is me, that such a sorry happening should mar so brave a day. Bethink thee 'twas of thy choosing. Dost thou hold me blameless, thou messenger of the King?"

"In good sooth, I do hold thee blameless. For a foolish wager in yon hostlery, I have overstepped the bounds of prudence. My good sword is unbroken. For this the saints be thanked. I wot well they did not cast my body

over the cliff and into the sea. Tell me, damsel, did thy fair arms encircle my neck, or was it idle visioning of a disordered brain?"

Florette's face flushed with a crimson hue as she replied: "In good sooth, sir, thy wits are wandering. I was a good hundred paces distant."

"It was not thy sweet voice that whispered: 'Come to me; thou art mine.'"

"Thou hast a fever on thy brain, sir cavalier. It ill-beseemeth one of gentle blood to stoop to unmaidenly frowardness. Nattie will conduct thee to Mother Shipley's. God speed thee on thy journey."

Sir Jasper moved painfully over the broken pathway. It was yet four hours to daylight when they reached the postern gate. The wounded man said: "Thou art a well-conditioned youth. Thou hast the wisdom of a man." Having made this brave speech, the messenger said: "Tarry with me the night."

"It may not be, sir. Dantima's streets are not for such as I when darkness comes apace. It is so written in the burg's decrees."

"I will not press thee, lad; go thy way."

The wounded nobleman moved painfully along the dark streets. At times he leaned heavily on his sword as if to strengthen the steadiness of his walk. Thus he reached the inn, threw himself upon the bed, overcome by fatigue. He slept till the sun was high in the heavens. The following morning he arose very much refreshed. The healing lotions and salves of Mother Shipley were grateful to the bruises; the deft fingers mended the unseemly rents. He ordered his good steed.

"Come, sir cavalier, and thou departest without so much as saying a good day. Thankful shouldst thou be that

thou livest to tell the tale. Thou are the first that ere came thence alive."

"Why, thou ill-mannered churl, am I a mountebank that ye thus stare. The devil has marked thee for his own. Thou hast on thy breast a strange white letter of the foul fiend's own invention, which thou wilt carry to thy dying day. All the holy water in Dantima's cathedral will not wash it out."

"I bethink me the lad and maiden did look wonderingly at me."

The King's messenger threw a golden piece upon the table and ordered four gallons of the lady's best brewing, which the loungers good-naturedly quaffed and drank to the courage of this soldier of fortune.

With a genuine God-speed, he threw his right leg over the restless animal, straightened his body in the saddle, and soon the regular beat of his horse's hoofs was a memory in Dantima. The distance to London was a good score of leagues. He turned over and over in his brain the strange incidents that crowded into such a brief period of his existence. The strange white letter was a devil to glare at him. He placed his silken doublet over it. The fabric seemed as glass, because it glowed the brighter. In good sooth, the baleful sign was eating its way into his brain.

He accomplished the King's mission, yet fearful was the cost. The adventure that would have honored a knight of the round-table became a source of regret. The comely face of the damsel haunted him. The mystery that surrounded the cottage on the cliff, the familiar objects he had seen a score of times, confirmed the suspicion that the King maintained. Down deep in his heart he made

a knightly vow to keep sacredly the promise he gave to the maiden and thus lose the King's favor. "Well, so let it be," he morosely sighed.

CHAPTER III.

THE CUSTOM HOUSE OFFICER AND THE ADMIRAL CLOSETED.

THE King's customs' gatherer gazed stupidly at the retiring figure of the young nobleman and muttered with that thickness of speech that the wine produced: "A fool for the devil! And I am a sinner if he seeth daylight! Well! well! he kept his counsel, and I am none the wiser." As the shades deepened he sank to rest in his great arm-chair.

The next morning the energies that beer and tobacco enthralled were fairly active. This awakening was something of a revelation to Rudolf, whose attenuated frame and joints worked by sections. His master actually sat erect and gave one order, to countermand it at the next breath, until the overgrown clerk sat down in that bewilderment that modesty induces.

"Nattie! Nattie! come here, my boy. Run, fly to pier No. 9. A boat will row thee to the ships. Come back, Nattie. Are thou sure thou understandeth me?"

The boy looked at the bundle of papers that were open and then at the speaker, and drawled out: "Yes, sir."

"Be off with thee as fast as thy slim legs may carry thee! Stay! my good little man; give them to no one but the officer that asks for them."

Nattie obeyed his instructions to the letter, for he passed down the street on a swift run. When he reached the pier, instead of mounting the steep steps he passed under the stout stanchions and eagerly read each line of the despatches. The half-witted expression on his face was gone. Sound sense beamed in every look as he

hastily refolded the document and returned it to the wrapper, glided from his secure retreat, climbed to the top of the pier and waved to and fro the package of papers he held in his hand.

The regular dipping of oars drifted across the water. The King's good seamen sent the boat alongside and took the lad on board. With a strong pull they returned to the man-of-war and drifted astern ready to obey the second command of the superior officer.

Nattie climbed up the stair gangway and moved across the deck to where a group of officers were standing. One of them took the package and went below, remarking as he went: "Wait here a moment, my lad; I have an answer to send back." During the interim the widow's son gazed curiously around at the orderly arrangement of the deck, the triangular pile of cannon balls by the side of each gun (whose bright side glistened in the sun), looked warlike. The boy noted that the tompions of the guns were removed. He noted that the deck was sanded and everything cleared for action.

Nattie was soon skimming over the waters of the bay with the sealed package in his hand, which he delivered to the custom-house officer. "Yes! yes! my boy, thou art tired and out of breath. Sit down and rest."

"Nattie, I may want to use thee once more. Be thou within call, laddie. Dost hear?"

The tramping of many feet outside aroused this officer to a more energetic line of action. Again he sung out: "Nattie, run to the door; dost thou see any movement in the fleet?"

"Yes, sir; the admiral and some of his officers are landing at the wharf. How their epaulets glisten in the sun!"

"An admiral, didst thou say, good lad?"

"Aye, sir. I e'en heard it from the sailors that did row me to the ship. Here they are at thy door."

"Be thou within earshot, my boy. I will e'en make an admiral of thee."

Nattie gave his wolfish canine friend a signal that the dog understood, for he stretched his shaggy side full length on the stone floor, while his young master pillowed his unkempt head on the hound's chest and feigned drowsiness.

While a sentinel paced forwards and backwards along the gloomy hall this group of seamen were closeted with His Majesty's mountain of obesity. They cast inquiring glances at the sleeping boy and dog. The custom-house officer quieted their suspicious thoughts by remarking:

"Don't mind him. He is as deaf as a cannon rammer, and all at sea in his maintop rigging. What plan of action thinkest thou is best, that good King Charles may profit thereby, to the damnation of this traitor's soul. If thou holdest thy good ships within the bay the quarry will scent the trap, and sea room will make a jest of thy good vigilance. Thinkest thou not so excellencies?"

"It is this that brought us hither to this old rookery. The damp and mold of ages do hang upon its walls. It hath a ghostly flavor that maketh my very flesh to creep; so let us be brief, good friends. Where is thy harbor chart, good man? I would mark the shoalings that skirt the bay."

"Rudolf! hast thou such a tracing. If thou hast such a parchment, in the King's good name, produce it."

The musty parchment was spread upon the table and same was closely inspected by the group of officers who gathered around the chart.

"It is impossible to base a line of action on this piece of

antiquity," the admiral exclaimed, with a slight accent of disgust in his speech. "Hast thou nothing better?"

The officers of the men-of-war returned to their boats, and pulled for the ships that tugged at their lines, as the tide rose and fell. When darkness hid the shore line, they weighed anchor and sailed out with the tide. The war-dogs stood well into the headland where the channel was narrowest. There they cruised up and down under an easy press of canvas, waiting for the ship they were to intercept.

The shadows of evening warned Nattie that the loved ones across the lonely glen were watching for his return with more than ordinary interest. At every step through the crowded streets the boy was halted. He had the same answer for all. He smiled as he listened to the epithets that followed his retreating footsteps. When the walls of the city were behind him he quickened his gait and climbed the steep hill, and was folded in his mother's arms.

"Father is coming!" the boy shouted with delight. He seated himself by the side of his mother, and while she brushed back the tangled hair from his forehead he related the events of the day that were stirring enough to pale the sweet face with anxious fear.

"Don't be alarmed, mother. Well thou knowest that father is too good a sailor to be caught in such a flimsy net."

"The men-of-war in the bay are well armed. Your papa's ship will be no match for them at close quarters, I fear me, my son."

"True, mother, I would not give one of father's guns for all they show in broadside. The stern chaser well served would sink both ships, so cheer up, mamma.

Father is sailing as straight towards us as the compass can point."

"But, my son, if he sails straight into the bay his long range gun will be of little use."

"Why should he sail into the bay? Hast thou forgotten the signals?"

"I thought we would never need them, my son. The danger that surrounds us made me forgetful. I wish that the mission that sent us hither was ended."

"Look alive, mamma, darkness is upon us, and darkness it is. How fortunate for us that it is so. Pull down the green shades for the two outside windows, and the two red ones for the middle windows, while I sweep the horizon for papa's three red light signals."

It was well toward midnight, and still no success rewarded their anxious watchfulness.

"Hist! mother. He is coming with a straight keel to us! No! he has seen the danger signals and is luffing. He has put out all of the lights and will be with us in an hour."

"What are the King's ships doing? Canst thou see their lights, my son?"

"Father is leading them a merry chase. They stand well out to sea, while papa makes a clean run for the cliff."

The gurgling waves as they were cloven by the keel of some ship told the watchers that all was well. Nattie gave the spyglass to his mother, ran out into the night, and turned the windlass of an unused well. Two low whistles came from under the ground, and the brave boy was embraced with the warmth his courage deserved.

"I see, Nattie, thou didst not forget my instructions. God bless thee for the care thou hast taken of thy mother

and sister during my absence. The signal of danger saved me from a very unpleasant situation. I saw their binnacle lights, and they saw mine. They were out-maneuvred while I passed between them and escaped."

"How fortunate we were when we secured this ghost-ridden cottage. Hast thou seen aught to distress thee? No goblins to make the night hideous?"

"None, my husband. These ghostly tales are not myths, I do assure thee. Already the King's messenger felt their awful power. Bruised and sore he rode straight back to London with a strange white letter on his breast of the devil's own marking."

"What thou tellest smacketh of witchcraft. Namest thou this messenger of the King?"

"Sir Jasper, if it pleaseth thee. A cavalier of noble parts. Fear hath no domain in his heart."

"God wot but this disturbeth me sorely, for he is fearless and bold; an enemy to be dreaded, since he gave his knightly word that the rights of hospitality should be silence. Well, so let it be. I fear not the powers of His Majesty's minions."

"Nattie, when thou seest a rosary hanging on the left arm of the cross in the grotto, come and tell me. Now go to thy duty, that suspicion may sleep."

Nattie gave no sign that happiness was in his heart. He came and went with a listlessness that was convincing. The third day he notified his father that the rosary was on the arm of the stone cross. The captain of the nameless vessel moved cautiously through the silent glen, and met the agent from London. While these two men exchanged packages, Nattie and the dog guarded the trysting place with a watchful care. For a good hour these outlawed friends sat together. Then each went on his

dangerous way, mindful of his duty to the cause he espoused; a cause that was not measured by worldly honor.

The mysterious vessel waited for the darkness of the moon. Then she departed under the noses of the shotted guns.

CHAPTER IV.

THE KING'S MESSENGER IS BANISHED FROM COURT.

WHEN Sir Jasper reached London, he rode at a sharp trot to his abode. The curious stares that met him at every turn made him timid where he should be bold. Very deliberately he exchanged his travel worn raiment for robes of the court, because King Charles was sensitively punctilious in such observances. The King's favor was the bread upon which this nobleman thrived, for this reason, he spared no pains to bedeck his person with that which would be pleasing to His Majesty.

How he cursed the fatal letter that seemed to glow with a white intensity that was appalling. Well he knew that this devil's charm would cost him, perhaps, the loss of his head, or still worse, the loss of His Majesty's favor. His reluctant steps fell softly on the paved halls of the palace as he made his way to the grand salon. The gay and profligate court stared as Sir Jasper entered the throne room where the King was receiving some ambassadors from a foreign court.

A pleased smile played upon the King's face as Sir Jasper advanced and bended lowly at the foot of the throne. He bended lowly, because he wished to conceal the fatal mark upon his breast.

"Thanks, Sir Jasper, thou hast our gracious acknowledgment for a duty so promptly performed. Did aught of adventure bring thee surcease for the ride? Didst thou break a lance for some fair maiden's favor?"

Every word was a wound, though spoken in jest. Bowing low to hide the devil's mark he replied:

"Nothing of adventure, Your Majesty. My good steed was sorely jaded by the journey. I delivered the despatches. Here is the custom house officer's receipt for the package."

The King noted not the strange mark on Sir Jasper's breast until an exclamation from the Queen directed the King's attention to Sir Jasper's silken doublet. How bitterly this nobleman cursed the dazzling whiteness of the fatal letter, that glowed with all of the intenseness of a sun-lighted snowbank.

"Sir Jasper, thou hast our sore displeasure. Thou comest in masquerade to mock the gratitude thou hast so richly earned, and thus thou makest a jester's holiday of our royal court. God wot such a pleasantry had cost many a gentler heart his head."

"Kneeling before Your Majesty, I crave the indulgence of your royal will. Far be it from this loyal heart to masquerade to your Grace's displeasure. Alas! sire, this cursed mark is not of my choosing. The foul fiend did reward idle curiosity, to make a wreck of future years."

"Verily, Sir Jasper, this be more marvelous happening than ere befell the truest knight of King Arthur's court. Tell to us this strange adventure, and thou shalt have reinstatement to our royal favor."

"Your Majesty, I have naught to relate."

"Naught to tell? Then how stands yon sign upon thy breast?"

"Your Majesty can as well explain the cause, for I wot not what evil power so marked me."

"Sir Jasper, it is our royal will that thou fallest from our high grace this day, and the punishment be banish-

ment from our presence till yon clownish mark is well removed."

"Then, sire, I say to thee farewell. There beats no true or more loyal heart within thy realm. This sign will teach to me that even kings forget that duty should be honored, since misfortune crowned me at thy command."

Not a ripple marked the spot where high ambition drowned, it was a dream of yesterday. He bowed lowly to the throne and vanished from the courtly throng. His absence was scarcely marked. The revelry of this monarch's court was a jest for the roundheads, whose psalm singing made life a painful duty; a graveyard where pleasure was buried.

With hasty strides he reached his apartments in waiting, dismissed his equerry and attendants, and seated in a luxurious seat, he pondered deeply over his future. The ingratitude of the King came back to him with a four-fold power. There was naught to soothe his wounded vanity. The hard, cold future stared him in the face, and the future must be the touchstone to test his manhood. Involuntarily, he tightened his sword belt. The old love of adventure came back to him.

"Come to me, thou art mine," kept knocking at the door of his imagination. Again he felt the soft arms around his neck. He dreamed and dreamed until a soft rap on the door recalled his wandering thoughts.

"Thou art here, my gracious Queen? I would serve thee unto the end of my life, and then 'twere cheaply bought, since life and banishment are twin brothers that travel on misfortune's road."

"Sir Jasper, my heart pleads for thy reinstatement to His Grace's favor. Right well I know some honorable

motive seals thy lips to thy disfavor. Give me thy confidence, that all may be well."

"Your Grace, the King will bethink him when he stands in strong need of friends that this loyal heart will be at his service. By to-morrow's sunrise I shall be on the road to Dantima. Right gladly do I honor His Majesty's command, since this letter on my breast is my bannered guerdon. It blazes with an unholy light to make a scarecrow of my presence."

"In good sooth, I wish that His Majesty's kingdom were filled with such loyal hearts. Thy silence is noble. In serving thy manhood, thou servest thy Queen. Be true to the vow thou hast made, and Heaven will direct thy steps. And now farewell till brighter days shall dawn on England."

Alone and dispirited, he reached the mansion of Lilly the Astrologer. This singular man sat in his study, surrounded by the paraphernalia and instruments of his profession. When Sir Jasper entered he was seated by a dignified movement of the astrologer's right hand.

"Thou art Lilly, the wizard, and I mistake me not?"

"Even so as thou sayest. How can I serve thee, good friend?"

"Tell me of this strange character on my breast. Remove it and thou mayest name thy price. It is a curse to me."

"I have no such power, my good friend. I could e'en cast thy horoscope."

"A horoscope sayest thou. Canst thou say aught of the future to the unraveling of this mystery. In good sooth, I would say thee amen."

"The horoscope is valueless for such a purpose."

"Canst thou tell the origin of this letter, if a letter it be."

"Never have these eyes rested upon such a character before. In good truth, it is most ancient."

"Stay! sir nobleman, get thee where the strange marking came to thee. The evil one that so marked thee alone can remove it."

This courtier's ownings were speedily transferred to the pawnshop. A trebble score of golden sovereigns were placed in his purse. Again was he on the highway to Dantima. The crowded thoroughfares of London were behind him; consequently the stares of idle curiosity were a provoking memory. Dantima was before him with its possibilities. The sweet face of the cliff maiden came to him as some bright picture, and his heart glowed with a more tender feeling. The letter would be no ghost to haunt her fancy.

He even hummed the air of a love ditty as he passed along the lonely road. Thus he beguiled the time till his stout steed drew up at the one gate of the ancient burgh, the one gate that was oak-ribbed and strengthened with a hundred iron bolts. The same family had been its keeper for numberless generations, until it was regarded as the exclusive right that succession bequeathed.

"Comest thou from the King, sir cavalier? Else thou gainest no admission here." While they were thus discoursing, the burghers stood with their arms crossed, which was likened to the meditation in prayer. This nettled the high spirit of this soldier of fortune, who exclaimed:

"Out upon thee for a set of brainless knaves. Wot ye not how this cursed sign came to me. I am not in

league with the evil one. If 'tis not to Dantima's liking, then must Dantima bear the ill. Thy boorishness is in need of civil training."

The frosty air of the country, and the long ride, made Mother Shipley's fare tasteful. As the shadows of evening cast their lengths over the massive walls of the town, this forlorn cavalier slept in the best bed; with its tall posts and linen sheets.

The morning was well advanced to the noon hour when he betook himself to the Custom House. He went there because he had nowhere to go. A feeling of gloom was over his life. 'Tis true that the burghers cared little for his present troubles; still less did they care for the ghostly letter on his breast. He contrasted the life of a courtier with the life as it existed in Dantima. Existence was intolerable to this cavalier. Anything to banish the tiresome present. For this reason he entered the tall archway, crossed the hall, and stood in the presence of the King's collector.

The gruff voice of this worthy personage greeted the cavalier with: "Welcome it is to thee, sir cavalier. And dost thou bring despatches from our good King? Ill a day that we failed to catch the wary ocean bird. His Majesty's sore displeasure will fall heavily upon Dantima."

"I tell thee, officer, 'twas ill a day when I galloped in post-haste to this ghostly burgh. Despatches have I none. Matters other than affairs of state sent my lagging will to this graveyard of promise. I would that the foul fiend should remove from my breast this scarecrow mark."

"One way that I wot of cometh to my brain: drown thyself for a fool. Still another way: hang thyself to the

nearest limb; thou wilt be a quit with the devil, and thus pay the debt."

"By our lady, thou art a kind counselor, forsooth. I will e'en wed the maiden that liveth on the cliff. A rarely good benedict will I be. This mark will insure a certain knowledge of my whereabouts that none can gainsay."

"A fool's adventure that brought a fool's reward."

"This is all thou canst promise to me, that hope may live again?"

"Beshrew thee, Sir Jasper, seek thou the monks in yon old Cathedral. The legend cometh in this wise: holy water and a monkish cowl will hide that which thou seekest to destroy. From human eyes only, mark ye; no power that I wot mortal can promise thee deliverance from such as thou bearest on thy bosom."

"Right glad am I that thou tellest me thus much. I will hasten to the fathers in yon monastic pile, and seek some spiritual consolation. Much I stand in need of certain churchly rites that have been too long neglected."

With a hope in his heart, a single hope that quickened his pulse-beats, he entered the gloomy portals of the Cathedral of Dantima.

Two persons were kneeling at the altar. One was the widow Deycourt, the other was Florette, the widow's daughter. The light that sifted through the tall stained glass windows was dim. As he became accustomed to the subdued light the outlines of the maiden's face came to him with a new force. It is true that he knelt submissively, yet his heart was not weaned from the ways of the flesh. The knee joints were stiffened by pride, and the tall form that was straight as a long shaft from a bow bended slowly to the Church's discipline.

"Sweet maiden, pardon thou the boldness of a stranger. Pray for me to yon sweet mother. Her eyes do melt my heart with grace. Be as gentle as her eyes, and pray that this fatal letter be removed, for it has wrecked my life."

"Nay, sir, such may not be. Father Leonard is in the sacristy. Prayers more potent than mine shall shrive thee of the marking. Thou art the King's messenger. Thou hast all the sympathy of my heart. 'Twas a rash, though brave adventure, but blame me not, 'twas of thy choosing."

"Knowest thou, maiden, that the keeping of my vow to thee lost me the King's favor? Thy secret is safely locked within this breast. Thou hast my knightly word for the promise."

"Surely thou hast a maiden's grateful thanks for thy loyal regard that I return in kind. Come to us at the grotto at any time that pleaseth thee."

When the penitents departed, Father Leonard came forward, and with gentle speech he said: "My son, what is thy wish? By thy dress thou art a cavalier of King Charles; comest thou in his name?"

"Father, I would be rid of this satan's mark. It scorcheth my pride so sorely that I am crazed with grief."

"Nay! nay! thy pride alone is wounded, yet thou art more blessed than those who wear the letter in their hearts, which letter the world may never see. The letter on thy breast has isolated thee from the world. Thy inward heart is pure, though the outward sign is unholy."

"Father, I pray thy good offices, and speedily."

"Wouldst thou forsake the flesh and the devil, and enter the priesthood of thy free will? Think well, my son, 'tis a solemn vow that may not be lightly broken."

"The sooner the better, holy father. Give me some healing salve for this grievous happening."

CHAPTER V.

THE WIDOW DEYCOURT GATHERING EVIDENCE.

THE disfavor of Dantima fell heavily upon the widow and her daughter. The edicts of Council, passed in solemn conclave, decreed that these two women be prohibited from entering the gateway of this ancient town. The penalty for the infringement of this recent law was death. Nattie, by reason of unsound mind, was exempted from the exactions that were brutal in their very nature. They were thus cut off from the privilege that was a source of happiness to them.

Thus, "The Grotto of Our Lady" became their only sanctuary. Morning and evening they repaired to the holy spot and offered up their prayers for the absent one, prayers for the success of their mission.

Nattie was untiring in his search for the property whose possession would make them truly happy. He worked so adroitly that no suspicion was directed to the dark corners that he had overhauled. His industry was rewarded by a genuine discovery. This particular package was green with mould; the contents were securely wrapped in a sailor's pea-jacket. The bundle was fastened with two broad leathern bands that had once been used for belts.

With eager haste the widow and her children unstrapped the bundle and sought for the prized evidence. "My son," she said, "the package of letters is not in the pocket of this coat where it should be. Alas! that I say so, all our danger and persecution is for naught."

"Say not so, my mother. One fact is established. The

person that owned this unclaimed baggage is buried in the graveyard on the brow of yon hill."

"How knowest thou this, my son?"

"It is so written in the records. These two eyes have seen the recording thereof. Cheer up, mother, there may be a second bundle not far from where this was found. I can at least locate the grave. A double score have I already overhauled. Patiently have I scraped the mould from the graven letters; the mould that it is Time's receipt for forgetfulness."

"If the lone grave is unmarked, what then, my son?"

"I do not mind the trouble, success will repay me a hundred fold. Thou knowest what papa said: 'Stand by thy guns.' I know that bundle of letters would have ended all of our misfortune. I may find it elsewhere."

The following morning, ere the slothful burghers were awake, the boy forced his way through the lonesome glen, and reached the graveyard by a circuitous way. He climbed over the ruined wall. The iron gate was fastened with a chain. Such protection was little needed. No footfall had disturbed the grass-grown lane for many years.

With a piece of metal the lad moved from tombstone to tombstone. He was free from the fear of detection. The tall weeds befriended him. Untiringly the bit of iron freshened the histories of generations. A fourth of the graves were unexplored. Still he sat, patiently seeking for the unknown grave. A storm was brewing. The patter and plash of scattering rain drops caused him to seek shelter in the ruined chapel that stood in one corner of the enclosure. The owls and bats that sought protection within its ancient walls beat their fingered, web-feathered wings on his face. They powdered his clothes

with fine dust as he seated himself in the chancel and waited for the storm to pass.

He noticed that the bats decreased in numbers, until the dusty air was clearer. Whither had they flown? In what part of the ruins had they concealed themselves? With a boy's curiosity, he sought to find their hiding place. The long reed that he held in his hand was thrust into each cavity on the sides. A slight crumbling of brick and mortar followed each prod of the stick. Then the slender stem was pushed into an opening of the chancel floor. The rod slipped from his fingers and disappeared.

He watched the bats as they came out of the narrow opening in the rear wall. The opening was large enough to admit his body. He stood in the crypt of this ancient chapel. The communion service of silver was black and discolored with age. The musty registers were scattered loosely around. A glad cry came to his lips, as he conveyed the first batch to the cottage on the cliff.

Pleasantly the long evenings were spent on the Devil's Elbow. Nattie, his mother and Florette carefully dusted the parchments, lest a letter be erased, or a name obliterated. The births, marriages and deaths were recorded with a scholarly hand. As yet these records failed to give up the evidence so material to success. Untiringly they pored over the compact columns, a roll call of the silent majority. Nattie clapped his hands in a boyish manner as he turned a page and pointed his finger to a name.

"Here is the record, mamma; our work is ended. The storm did us a good turn. I will not be sorry to sail from this gloomy port."

"Would that such were the case; the bundle of missing letters is worth a hundred such finds. Do not think I

am ungrateful, my son; misfortune has made thee a man in years; thy youth has been blighted. Perhaps in later years thou wilt understand what I hint at darkly now. Look ye, Nattie, that old green bags from London will be here, or rather I should say, that he will be in Dantima to-morrow. Be vigilant, and lead him away from the object of his visit."

Bright and early the following morning, the widow's son was at the gateway, whose solid arch of masonry towered above him. This entrance to the town was closed. The sleepy keepers were governed by no law, and the hum of industry had not yet disturbed the stolid dignity of these good burghers.

A little cloud of dust far up the road quickened the boy's perceptive faculties. Evidently the beast was jaded, or the supply of provender failed to hasten the arrival of the stranger. With a gentle amble the brute moved around broadside to where the boy was standing and meekly drooped his ears of unusual length on his neck. His vigorous bray rang like a blast from Gabriel's recording trumpet.

From the embrasured port-hole above the gate four cropt heads looked out with some alarm. The great oaken door swung on its hinges and the beginning of another day's anxiety fell upon Dantima. This person that cautiously dismounted was a different person from the cavalier that rode at a breakneck speed and demanded entrance in the King's name. This latest arrival planted one foot upon the ground with some uncertainty, as if to assure himself that the land had not been removed by an earthquake. When he had assured his judgment that this was terra-firma, the other foot followed in the same cautious manner.

When both feet were planted squarely on the earth, he shook out the numbness that cramped his thin legs, threw the reins over his arm, and followed Nattie to the inn. "Don't go, my son, that is a good lad. I want you to show me the way to the Custom House."

This counselor's face was a perfect type of wit and shrewdness. The restless gray eyes were constantly in motion and rolled from right to left, as if they feared some valuable information would escape them.

His Roman nose stood out boldly from this counselor's face in a very unusual manner. In fact it was the most prominent feature of the man's face. The shrunken cheeks and deep caverned eyes made this deformity more noticeable. A thin beard covered his throat. His hair was fastened with a cue. A long black bag was fastened to his belt by an iron chain of modest proportions. When he finished the frugal meal he sat awhile to rest the tired body, and gazed into the street in an abstracted way.

"Come, my lad, I am ready ; the sooner at it, the sooner over it. I want to get away from the graveyard dampness of this strange town that God seems to have forgotten. My bones ache now with the very prospect of passing a night here. Forward at once to the Custom House."

He followed Nattie across the square and then around the old Cathedral, to the government building. It was amusing to see the way this agent went over the magnificent proportions of the King's tax-gatherer. These stares of curiosity fretted the mountain of fat, who drew an extra whiff of tobacco smoke from the bowl of his pipe and sent it straight into the throat of the ill-mannered visitor, who coughed violently for five minutes, and

rushed to the entrance. When he returned to the charge, there was a merry twinkle in his eyes, as he croaked:

"Which is the Custom House and which is the steeple?"

"I am the Custom House——"

"Is the Custom House within?"

"Yes, what dost thou want?"

"Egad! the storage capacity is ample for England and her dependencies." Casting his shrewd eyes to where Rudolf was standing, he continued: "The steeple timber runs to extra lengths. Thou hast never rain here, hast thou?"

"Yes, why should we not have rain? From thy shrunken parts, it seemeth to me that water was scarce where thou wast hatched."

"It is a physical impossibility; yon tower splits the clouds, else am I mistaken?"

"Out with thy mission and begone, thou fool. Enough of thy legal wit. Thou art as edged as some wise saw. The King's true servant will not suffer from over feeding on such parlance."

"Easy there, thou rude of speech, knowest thou not that I come by authority from the King?"

"His Majesty hath fools for the naming. I would that the devil had placed his seal upon thy prodigious nose."

The counselor fumbled in his black bag for a moment and drew therefrom an order permitting him to examine certain packages that had been over long in mildew and neglect. This he handed to the officer, who in turn passed it to Rudolf, with this remark: "Rudolf, show thou this pettifogger fair attention. He cometh from court. It is a courtesy due His Majesty."

The seeker after information made a sign to Nattie to follow. "My lad, here is a good round shilling, and thou

helpest me to handle this vile stuff that is black with age."

Nattie with his usual shrewdness diverted the attention of this visitor from the unclaimed packages that he had not examined to the pile he overhauled, while Rudolf repaid the merciless wit in kind.

"I hope, Sir Baizebags, that thou wilt pardon the neglect on my side, a neglect that may cost thee thy life. Some of the baggage thou hast handled is marked, 'small-pox,' or I am an ass."

"Thou villain! and thou toldest me not of this? Here have I spent a good two hours in this search."

"I thought in fair sooth the foul markings wouldst add to thy beauty, and make that nose picturesque in its ruggedness. Thus, good stranger, a slight roughness of thy rough nose, that resembles some towering cliff, might, in good King Charles' name, reach up to the steeple that splits the clouds.

"Thou art safe for a good nine days. The lesson will teach to thee some fair manners, and prove an excellent remedy for senseless wit that does not spare the feelings of others, who have not been so fortunate in possessing such a valuable piece of property as thy nose."

"Come, good clerk, I meant thee no harm; thou canst do me a service in this matter by turning to thy records for these dates. A full year's time would be the price of this searching among these piles of filth and disease."

"The letters and documents thou searchest for mayhap were burned."

"Art thou sure, good youth, that the packages so dated and numbered were destroyed in the manner thou speakest of?"

"I said not so, thou foul fiend of the law, as this poor lad duly witnesseth, and wouldst thou have me before

the King's bench for perjury? Out upon thee for a knave."

The barrister's eyes gave a pleasurable twinkle of satisfaction as they merrily glanced from post to pillar, just as if his mind was measuring their massive height. His fingers were firmly interlaced. This leverage gave to the palms of his hands a shifting motion, pleasant, because the nervous friction gave a warm glow to these cold extremities.

"Well! well!" the visitor bantered, "it is a matter of no concern if, as thou sayest, they were destroyed by fire."

"Again thou liest, old Belzebub, thou liest in thy throat, and I said not such. Well thou knowest it may be e'en now in yon pile. Is it fair duty that ye shirk? Go to, thou tormenter of evidence."

"Thanks for thy assistance. Our good King Charles must be e'en congratulated for the having of such able servants. Right well thou knowest that I shall make proper mention of this issue."

"Add to this, my humble request that His Majesty send to Dantima a man of gentle nurture, possessed of a civil tongue. One in good sooth that hath kind regard for the meanest of his subjects."

"Verily, good youth, thou hast the making of a courtier in thy bones. Such speech smacketh of a gentler breeding. With this endeth our investigation." The barrister retraced his steps, and by devious windings reached the graveyard that Nattie had so patiently overhauled. The long thin limbs of this old law-bags dangled from the inner face of the low-walled enclosure. An air of solemn meditation gave to his thoughts a gentler turn as he soliloquized:

"A poor fool am I to hie me hither on such a mission,

and for the trouble receive a fool's pay from this titled lady. My good donkey shall bear me hence within the hour. The apothecary's vile lotions will be my reward for over-diligence."

He climbed down from the ruined wall, gave one hopeless look at the regular rows of dead people, and returned to the hostelry, paid his tithing, and ambled along the road to London, thankful that the darkness of Dantima made not his lodging a pest-house of complaint.

The regular lope of the donkey's hoofs was only out of earshot e'er the hard pounding of a horse's iron-shod feet drew nearer to the gateway. It was the evening hour. The sonorous voices from within the gate-keeper's lodge sounded sweetly on the quiet air, as they intoned a psalm from the Bible.

"What ho there! thou psalm-singing hypocrites. Have done with thy cant and open in the King's good name."

"Have a civil tongue in thy head, thou of the devil's breeding. Thy locks are womanish in the curl. Why comest thou not ere the day be done? Knowest thou not the curfew rang this good hour?"

"Open, I say, or a full troop of His Majesty's horse will e'en enforce the demand. As against thy law such threats are vanity."

"Sir cavalier, and sayest thou that such things be? Is strife then so near that blood-letting must follow in this commonwealth, where all is peace?"

The young courtier paid no heed to this rude speech, but answered in this wise: "Come, good fellow, guide my steps to the Custom House, and leave such matters of state to thy King."

"I show thee not a good rood of the way. Find it for thyself, with thy ill-mannered tongue, if thou canst."

The courtier never dismounted, but cleared the low railing and rode at a sharp trot through the streets of Dantima. By dint of questioning he found the somber building, threw his rein to a bystander, and hurried along the passageways, until the sound of voices arrested his steps. He entered the main room that was used for sleeping purposes. It was used also for an office. He gave a look of supreme contempt at the huge proportions of the slumbering figure in the great armchair, and shouted in his ears:

"Wake up, thou conglomeration of stupidity and fat; it is likely that thou wilt lose thy office, notwithstanding that smoke-stained parchment with the great seal of England upon it. The vessel landed under the noses of yon fine men-of-war. Thou hast done more damage to the cause of King Charles than thy unwieldy carcass could o'erbalance in the scale of duty with thrice thy added weight."

"Come, thou courier of the King, be not o'er boorish with thy speech; no ship entered this good port in a twelve day. Mayhap the devil was at the helm, and cometh in ghostly guise."

"'Tis passing strange the vessel bearing despatches was sighted in the offing, and sayest thou she ran not to this port? Beshrew thee, man, thy wits need sharpening; ale and smoke befoul thy reason."

"I will e'en have message with the fleet. If thou sayest, I tell to thee, Sir Cavalier, that His Majesty is in grievous error."

"Where is Sir Jasper? The King hath sore need of his loyal service; let us have speech with him at once."

"Ask thyself the query. I withheld not good advice to him. Did he give good heed? I wot not."

"And thy advice?"

"Kill thyself, Sir Jasper, and end the misery that preyeth on thy vitals as some vulture that is not o'erfed."

"Thou dotard, it appealeth to me to strike thee with this good sword for thy insolence. England can ill spare such loyal hearts. Bestir thyself; since thou art bedridden, let yon varlet seek him at once."

"I know not whereof he is."

"Find him! find him!! It is the King's command. God wot but I know little of this old burgh, and by faith I wish to know less."

"Rudolf, make thou all haste to find the King's messenger, the one with the Devil's mark upon his breast."

Within the hour the clerk returned and reported that horse and rider had disappeared.

"And is it so? A sorry courier I will be to the King, with such report on my lips, and for my long ride a full share of abuse. Search till thou dost find him; tell him to ride post haste to court, the King hath sore need of his good offices." This young gentlemtn vaulted into the saddle and dashed through the gateway at a furious pace, unheeding the curses that followed at safe distance.

CHAPTER VI.

THE KING'S MESSENGER AND THE ALCHEMIST.

THE King's messenger was lost to the world, was lost to his King, because he had taken holy orders.

The cruel words of the King had wounded Sir Jasper deeply; the breach had widened beyond recall. He was buried in one of the cells of the monastery. He did not heed the hardness of the stone couch, or the humble fare, that consisted of brown bread and water. His vows were too solemn to be lightly broken, and in his loyal heart he struggled with all the temptations that would unbidden fill his soul. The burning letter was hidden beneath his cowl, yet its influence came like some mocking devil, to make his vows a scourge that had a hundred leathern lashes.

Daily he perfected himself in the duties of his holy office. The ritualistic ceremonies were quickly mastered. His new life was a real living life, yet try as he would, the fair face of the maiden came to him during the hours of his devotions, and the mysterious words, "Come to me, thou art mine," stood out like the handwriting on the wall. It seemed to draw him onwards to restlessness. The words implanted in his mind a fulfillment of a remedy for a desperate disease.

The shaven head of a priest was not to his liking; therefore he disobeyed the injunctions of Father Leonard, whose kindly heart and understanding told him that this cavalier monk would soon be recalled by the King, the Holy Church had other uses for this neophyte's good

sword in a wider field. For this reason the discipline of the order was relaxed.

It was the young priest's day in the confessional. Thankful he was for the seclusion of the sable curtain, with its little opening. For an hour he listened to the small foibles of life as they came from pentitent lips. The admonition, spoken with meek gentleness, relieved the sins of omission of those who sought spiritual consolation. The last footfall had sounded on the marble pavement. He gathered up his robes and was preparing to leave, when one of the youths came hastily to the confessional.

"My son, confess thou quickly, for the hour is past. I would to my devotions with all haste."

"'Tis not for myself that I plead, Holy Father. One cometh who is denied this privilege; remain thou for her good sake, and Heaven will bless thee."

"Thy name, good son?"

"I am Carl, the alchemist's boy."

"An alchemist in Dantima saidst thou? Mistakest thou not the word, good lad; knowest thou what an alchemist is?"

"Holy Father, if years of bitter experience teach not the meaning of the term, then am I a fool. Want pincheth where diligent study o'ermasters sound judgment; the crucibles and retorts do glow with constant heat, and yet transmutation is a far-off dream."

"Fool that I was to don this priestly robe. Oh, Hate! thou art a servant of the devil, and haste flyeth with quick wings to mar the thoughts of yesterday. An alchemist in Dantima, and I knew it not. Good youth, hath thy father parchments that teach his mystical art?"

"The rarest in all England. Here cometh the penitent,

good father; I will retire to yon solemn nave and await the coming of the maiden."

The cavalier monk's head drooped slowly on the marble slab, where rested his rosary and prayer-book. "The devil is tempting me to the ruination of my vows. It is the maiden from the cliff that kneeleth to me in penitence. Blessed be this sombre curtain that hideth me from her eyes." The voice of the fair girl came to him like the notes of some well-tuned lute. Naught said he lest the spell be broken. The pleading tones that reached his ears aroused him from the lethargy. "Father, hast thou no blessing for me?"

"Yes, child; the blessing of God and Mary rest upon thee and thine."

"Nay, father, I would hear more; for thy voice is music in my ears; the voice comes back from happier days."

"Go, my daughter, go in peace."

The last echo of her voice melted into silence. It seemed to the priest that he was losing her forever; churchly vows and orders were forgotten in the mad whirl that rent his soul. A mad impulse brought him to her side. Faster her feet hastened along the paved way to the pier where a boat was waiting for her. Carl and Nattie were ready at the oarlocks; then the rush of many feet, and the maiden was surrounded by a throng of zealots.

The tall, muscular form of the priest was upon the mob. He seized an oar and laid about him so vigorously that the crowd fell back in some confusion. While the maiden's rescuer lifted her into the boat, the great, fierce dog kept up a constant growling; the boys plied their oars and Florette was safe.

Amidst the jeers of these roundheads he retired to his

cell in the monastery, to think of the alchemist and his parchments. His duties to the church seemed far enough away from his busy thoughts. Some relief whispered to his heart a hope that grew brighter as he reasoned. Guiltily he crept forth from the sanctuary to find this strange man of wisdom, that dealt in the black art, so repugnant to the church's teaching.

The alchemist scarcely noticed the black-robed priest that came day after day to pore over the mystical learning of the East; each was bent upon the fruition of his hopes, unmindful of the other's presence. Thus time sped swiftly away, yet brought no relief to the monk. For weeks he traced the Hebrew characters back to their roots; the most ancient Hebrew writings were overhauled to no purpose. He studied Greek and Latin inscriptions, hoping to find a counterpart to the letter on his breast; even the Egyptian mysteries came in for a scholarly inspection. His intense application was unrewarded; the fatal letter still glowed beneath his cowl with an unholy power. The soft arms were yet around his neck; the same words, "Come to me, thou art mine," were still ringing in his ears.

The priest had not exhausted the source of information, the alchemist's shelves were as yet scarcely touched. A suggestion from Carl's father turned the tide of destiny. "I bethink me," he said, "that the character on thy breast smacketh sharply of Arabian lore. This race was a learned race, that delved deeply in the occult; seek ye diligently among the parchments at the end of this row, and my word for it that thou findest the meaning thereof."

Fresh with the promise of success, the monk delved yet deeper in the brown parchments from the burning sands of Arabia. A great thankful amen came boister-

ously from the feverish throat of this seeker as he spake: "Come hither, good alchemist, my heart is filled with joy; see, here is the character that meaneth much or little for me. Interpret thou the language; I know not of such lettering or of such lore."

"It is the science of astrology, of which I know little. Go thou to their country, the fountain-head of such learning."

"What part of Arabia, thou thrice-blessed man; and may the devil torment him who harmeth thee or thine?"

"I see here Mecca, Medina, situated in Hedyez, Venus, and the Tropic of Cancer; and last of all, Petra. Further, I cannot tell thee, because I am not a seer, nor wear the strange robes."

"Give me thy permission to make a neat copy, that it may guide my wanderings in this strange land of promise."

"As thou wilt, good monk. Knowest thou not the dangers? If the sands swallow thee not up, these fierce robbers that scour the wastes will make sure of thy destruction."

"A fig for thy fears, good man. Is it not to my betterment, good sir, that this letter be removed from my breast? What is danger to the man that dareth all things for the daring?"

"Have it as thou wilt, good monk; I will to my crucibles, and thou to thy destiny; and now, farewell."

"Not so, friend; take this purse, it containeth a treble score of bright sovereigns. Keep thou it for thy temporary wants, and yet thou art illy paid for the service rendered. It will mend thy temper and the replenished larger will make a brave peace within thy walls."

When the monk departed, the alchemist, unmindful of

the treasure, returned to his idols, and the event was forgotten. Not so with Sir Jasper. He placed the precious information within the folds of his cowl and hurried to his cell, where he sought his inkhorn and quill. Faithfully he transcribed the token of astrology in an enduring manner. He had hardly placed the inkhorn and pen in its niche when Father Leonard entered and stood reproachfully before the neophyte.

"Is it thus, my son, that thou servest the church? Fie upon thee, thou dreamer. Hast thou so soon forgotten the vows that bound thee to this order? There is work to do in God's vineyard, and laborers are few. Go to the Grotto of Our Lady that thou mayst confess the gentle hearts that seek spiritual consolation; they have been deprived of this churchly privilege by the cruel hand of legal stupidity."

"Father, forgive thy truant son. Right well I feel this unworthiness that sits heavy on my soul, or is it that I am too worldly-minded for such holy offices? Couldst thou absolve me from the vow?"

"In good sooth can I not absolve thee from the taking of the vow; no power on earth, save the Pope, the church's Holy Vicar, can do this. Now to thy holy calling, as I bade thee."

"And the breaking of the law, good father? How sayest thou in this matter; thou knowest the prohibition?"

"Tush! My son, the church is more powerful than the law; obey and fear not. Thy manly deed of the rescue is yet in my memory. God will bless thee for it, even to Dantima's disliking."

When the father quitted the cell, the unhappy monk fell into a strange dreaming. The hard couch of stone seemed lighter than the luxurious drapery of the King's

chambers. Lying upon his back (with his gaze fixed upon the arched roof), the beauties and luxuries of the world came back to him with a double force. "I am young; what is the journeying of a thousand miles, with all of its strange adventure, to this unbearable woe, that eateth into my very soul." He looked lovingly at the parchment and murmured: "Here on this bit of dressed lamb's-skin I behold that which giveth me freedom; shall I cast it from me? Nay, by my life not so shall it be."

"Not gone, my son, as I bade thee? I came to tell thee, curb thy rashness, or it may go ill with thee. Reach the grotto by a roundabout way; pass through the gate and along the highway, till thou reachest the glen by the towering elm. Be cautious, yet bold."

"The day is not far in its advancement, good father. I will hasten, ere the sun be set, and such spiritual consolation as I may give shall bless these unhappy exiles."

With a heavy heart he tightened the hempen cord that fastened his robe at the waist. He folded the lappings of his cowl closely over the letter and passed out of the gate unnoticed. The cool breeze that blew from the hill came like a greatful breath of the world, an inspiration that quickened his steps. "Here have I escaped one danger to fly into the arms of a second one, more formidable than the first. This maiden's face cometh to me with a right good grace, a winning grace, that wrecketh firm resolution, and Father Leonard so adviseth, to the church's disfavor. How weak is the spirit, while the flesh is a giant to crush me."

When he reached the ancient landmark, he turned from the King's highway and entered the cool forest, than invited repose. The wide-spreading branches that sheltered Saxon and Norman soldiers were over him; each

branch was a goodly page in history. He sat him down upon the moss-covered roots that showed above the soil; then a strange happening came to him while he sat in silent meditation. Voices from the roadside of the tree's giant trunk came to him to bring a fresher hope.

"Comest thou from London?" came to the ears of the monk in a guarded tone of voice. "His Majesty is in sore strait at the absence of the King's trusted messenger, and if I mistake not he sends a second courier for this soldier of fortune, that standeth in high favor at court."

"Sir Jasper thou meanest, the one that beareth the devil's mark for an armorial bearing. A fool hath a fool's reward, so runneth the proverb."

The cavalcade moved on, yet the welcome words lingered. The priest repeated the words of the proverb, and added, "The listening ear hath also its reward. God wot but this is brave news. I will e'en brush up my good blade, that I may yet strike a valiant blow in the cause of good King Charles, who suffered overmuch for real friends and loyal subjects."

With a firmer step and a more upright carriage, he pushed his way through the tangled underbrush and stood at the foot of the hill where he met with such a mishap. He bended forward and drank a cooling draught from the water that flowed musically at his feet. He glanced sharply upwards at the trodden path, yet ventured he not; a second encounter seemed not to his liking. This train of thought was interrupted by the sound of footsteps that drew nearer. "The footstep is light. By my troth, it is the maiden that cometh this way." He stepped within the grotto and stood behind the stone cross, that sheltered him from view. A heaviness came to his spirits as the maiden tripped lightly forward and knelt at the

foot of the gray cross. The secrets of a maiden's heart were poured forth with an earnestness that startled the priest, and he stepped from the shadows and entreated:

"Be not alarmed, Father Leonard sent me hither to confess thy mother and thyself. Art thou ready for the good offices of the church, or comest thy parent first in the count?"

"Father Leonard sent thee to us? Thrice blessed the day that gave us the privilege. A kind heart hath he, and a thoughtful consideration, promptings from his noble heart. I will to mother at once, for I need some little spiritual preparation that may not be neglected."

She tripped lightly up the steep ascent with a host of conflicting emotions agitating her mind. Her intuitions were dreams that came without the bidding, dreams that thrilled her with her delight. The widow approached the grotto with a reverential diffidence that made the service a duty of love. Right well the Father Confessor knew that she was keeping back the very misfortune that was harrowing her soul. He did not probe for the sorrows that lay so near to the surface, and he used not the church's privileges to learn what a king's ransom could not extract from his lips, and with the church's blessing on her and hers, he dismissed her.

When the gentle heart had returned to the cliff, Florette knelt meekly at his knee; her loosened hair covered her shoulders as with a veil; her eyes had that close, inquiring look that tried to peer behind the hood that was drawn over his face. No picture, I ween, was half so beautiful as the picture this grotto presented. The monk seated at the base of the cross, his concealed face inclined forward to catch the faintest whisperings that might come from the lips that had spoken no guile; the maiden per-

plexed and doubting, fearing to confess that which was on her soul, timidly lifting her soulful eyes as if the confession would be a transference of thought without the agency of speech, or some mute appeal to the power of love.

"Come, maiden, has thou naught to confess? Hast thou robbed some songbird's nest? Perchance thou hast broken some butterfly's wing?"

"Ah, father, thinkest thou so lightly of my confession? I have much to unfold that sitteth lightly on my soul. It is of the King's messenger that I would speak. Though he is absent, yet is he always present in my mind, to the undoing of my devotions. I have never been happy since he went away. I love him as I never loved a mortal before. I go over my beads and forget. I would that he would come back. Alas! he dwells in king's palaces, and I am lonely."

"My child, should he return, how would it better thy devotions? In time thou wilt forget, then thou canst renew thy allegiance to the church."

"Nay! nay! father, say not so, or I am undone. Let me hope that I may live; let me hope that a good day cometh, when my heart shall rejoice."

"Child, it is no sin to love, else had the whole world sinned. Hast thou naught to confess that I should hear? Tell me not of family troubles, I pray thee; keep them to thyself and I am comforted."

"I pray not for mine enemies, though overly much they need my prayers. For this I hope to be forgiven when the last day shall come."

"Would it please thee, maiden, to confess to me again, or shall other fathers of the order come to thee?"

"Come thou, good father, at thy pleasure; thy voice

comes to me as some sweet memory, and yet I wot thou art not he that came in the King's name."

"Should this messenger return, how wouldst thou bear thyself? Thinkest thou that it would make thee more zealous in thy duties?"

"I would live in the light of his existence, and these unhappy longings would be stilled to the betterment of my duty."

"In me behold the unhappy King's messenger. I, of the devil's marking, a very scarecrow of existence. For this I took holy orders; for this I sought thy love to the undoing of my vows."

A sharp cry of pain from the maiden distressed him. He quickly replaced the hood, as if to shield him from this temptation.

"O, father, it was unkind of thee to serve me thus." She hid her flushed face in his robes, and the tears came unbidden to her eyes. "Alas! that I should be so unmaidenly."

"Ah! child, thy sweet speech made me forget my churchly duty for the while. Forget what I have said, and I'll be gone."

"Nay! nay! I am not angry with thee, father, lover. Do not go."

The hood of the cowl was thrown back on the priest's shoulders, his long hair fell on his breast in wavy locks, his keen gaze was fixed full on the maiden's upturned face, and thus they sat, knowing not what to say, each busy with his thoughts. "Canst thou forgive me the transgression, thou tempter of the angels?"

"With a right good will, my father; give me thy double blessing."

"Thou hast the church's blessing and thou hast mine; can I say to thee more?"

"Yes, give me braver speech, or thou goest not to Dantima."

"Thou hast full possession of my heart to the undoing of my vow. It ill becometh me to come hither in these priestly robes; yet cling I to them to hide this mark upon my breast. Ah! thou knowest right well how it came to me. Woful remembrances have I this day of this foolhardy adventure that lost me the King's high favor."

"Yet it brought thee to me, else had I ne'er set eyes on thee again. Yield thee to the influence of the hour and go not hence; thy mad dreams of ambition will come to naught."

"Dost thou forget? Thou seest these priestly robes, good maiden—what do they tell to thee? How shall the hasty steps be retraced, steps that bound me to the order for life?"

"My own father can place his good offices with the Pope and free thee from thy vows. It has been done to my knowing, it may be done again."

"Maiden, how happeneth it that thy mother is a widow? Again, with the parting from these priestly robes, how shall I go forth into the world with this letter blazing on my breast to make a showing for idle eyes to stare upon?"

"Oh, sir, forget what I have said. Woe is me that I told thee so much, and yet I wot how loyally thy brave heart hath kept thy knightly word to me when thou didst meet me on Dantima's square."

"It matters little, thou idol of my heart; thy secret is safe within this breast. I will to Father Leonard and make my humble confession, devoutly kneeling, for I have wandered far from my honest intentions."

"Then he will say nay to thy coming, and I will be undone. Come thou to-morrow, and to-morrow, at thy will; nay, not thy will, but mine, thou very lover of my soul."

He retraced his steps along the weed-grown glen until he reached the great elm tree, where he turned into the highway and plodded soberly along the uneven road until he reached Dantima. His gloomy cell seemed to be a living tomb, now that the future promised so much. The confession that he promised to make was delayed, and on the morrow he wended his way to the cliff; nor did he halt at the foot of the hill, but pressed upwards until he stood at the gate of the cottage and made his presence known to the inmates.

Florette came hastily forward and extended both hands to her confessor.

"Now shall I make a day with thee and thy mother, for my cell seemeth gloomy enough since thou hast told me all. I will await thee at the spring. I would hold sweet counsel with thee, for my brain is in a whirl. Thus I live from day to day, knowing naught what the morrow bringeth forth."

"Thou art safe here in this fair woods, where no footsteps ere intrude. Strange, is it not, that the shadows that guard us from danger harm us not? Never yet have we heard those uncanny sounds, nor have we seen the blue lights that glow from the tops of these tall trees."

"I marvel that such is the truth, else had King Charles' troopers been here ere this. Let me enjoy thy sweet company while I may; to-morrow I may be far hence."

"Sayest thou so, my cavalier monk? Thou bringest sorrow to my heart. Here before this holy cross we will

plight our troth, that no earthly power shall break, and only death shall cancel."

"With a knightly grace, I say amen again and again. Come, we will reverently kneel here on this hallowed stone. Repeat thou with me these words: 'O, Almighty God, we swear to be true to the troth that binds us in Thy holy sight, true to each other so long as life may last. No fears shall fill our souls with dread, no untimely tales shall make us doubt our love one for the other. In all of the years to come we will fulfill this pledge.' "

"What, crying, Florette! when thou shouldst be happy?"

"It seemeth sad, and is the vaporing of thy sad life that presages stormy happenings in the future."

He detached the rosary from his cord and placed it on the neck of the maiden, and whispered: "Thus do I spread the church's protection around thee; now give me thine, for in this holy gift I shall remember thee forever. And now I must be gone ere the sun be down."

As he passed out of the glen, he softly repeated these words: "Oh, life, what promise dost thou make to me."

Then came back a hundred mocking echoes, as if the spirits of the woods were taunting him, and a musical laugh came again and again, and the words, "Come to me, thou art mine," haunted his brain to mar the happiness of the day and hour.

CHAPTER VII.

CARL, THE ALCHEMIST'S SON, IN THE PILLORY.

CARL, the alchemist's son, enfolded his mother in his arms, and kissed her reverently on the forehead, on each eye at a time, then on the mouth, as he pleadingly exclaimed:

"Mother, bake me two brown loaves of bread, and add to this the creamy cheese with the marble veinings of sage. Fill the little willow basket with freshly-laid eggs. I will to the brook to-day, the brook in the great shadowy glen; there I will catch thee a goodly string of fish for thy trouble."

"Ah! my son, right well I know where thy heart is. Beshrew thee, child, thy feet goeth where thy heart would be. For my sake, go not to the grotto. Every turn in yon gloomy woods smacketh of danger. Well, thou knowest the law; these foolish burghers will place thee in the pillory that standeth in the great square. What will become of us? Thou are our only mainstay now, since thy father hath no thought of existence as he delves in the mystical lore that maketh our daily want a reality."

"Mother, thou wilt not tell to any one what I tell to thee? Bend low thy ear. I have a purse filled with a treble score of bright sovereigns, that will bring comfort to thy heart. Here it is, and may God prosper the hand that anticipated our needs."

"Carl! Carl! how camest thou by the gold?"

"In good truth, I know not; it was lying on one of the tables in father's workshop, and he knoweth as little as myself whence came the gift."

"My boy, this purse hath seen brave times in King Charles' court; seest thou not the clasp and the threadings are of gold. We will keep it, and bless the giver for the generous gift."

"Mother, I will be off, as the morn groweth late. I will be at home betimes, fear thou not."

"There is an overanxious thought that goeth with thee; be prudent and yet bold. I send greetings by thee, Carl."

"Who will ere catch me? These sleepy people ne'er visit the glen; there is no real danger. Florette and her mother are sorely beset with trouble, and I will ne'er be the one to desert them when misfortune so sorely presses upon them. I am a man at heart, if the stature is lacking."

"The gosling down scarce shadeth thy lip. 'Tis true, thou art on the turn of a score of years."

With an affectionate kiss and a warm embrace he moved away from the humble dwelling that stood close to the great wall that surrounded the burgh. His well-filled basket was on one arm, his rod and line were resting on his shoulder. Thus equipped, he passed out the great gate and plodded along the highway to London. He noted the illy-concealed glances of displeasure that met him as he made his way towards the giant elm; these burghers looked with evil eyes upon him because they had not forgotten the rescue of the maiden when the strong arm of the priest scattered them.

"It behooveth me to go cautiously thitherward. I like not their scowling eyes, that are aflame with anger." When the town was hidden by hills and valleys, he turned into the shade of the glen and waded knee deep in the grass. The musical gurgle of the brook turned his footsteps into the heart of the woods. He sat upon a rock and cast his line into the stream. A dozen of fishes were

landed and dextrously cleaned. These he placed in a clean napkin and followed the creek to the Grotto of Our Lady; there he sat down and bended over the water to cool the flushed face that was reflected from the surface.

"Florette may never come to me to-day. I sit here like a fool to gaze upwards at the pathway that hath so many rough turns, which makes the ghost of fancy in every bush a scarecrow." The absorbing passion of his life was his love for this maiden. He was of that age that seeth love in every star and its whisperings in every breeze. To him her eyes were more beautiful than the eyes of the sainted Madonna that graced the chancel of Father Leonard's church. Her sad smile was more touching than the smile that wreathed the Madonna's face.

His own mother's warning words came to him again and again. Each time they left a deeper impress on his mind. He could see himself pinioned in the pillory. He could see the throng of upturned faces; he could hear the taunting jeers that fell from heartless lips. His nervous disposition almost gave way under the spell of thought. A light step above him changed his morbid feelings at once, for well he knew that Nattie's step was illy in keeping with his youth. In another moment Florette was standing by his side.

"Oh! my gentle playmate, why didst thou come to me? Wist ye not that I am three years thy senior. Wot ye not of the terrible penalty that would await thee shouldst thou be caught?"

"It is for love of thee, Florette."

Without noticing his remark, she continued: "Wot ye not that the cruel law hath set penalties that may not be lightly set aside? Foolish boy, thrice times ten hath it been read in open assembly. Think not that I am un-

grateful to thee, Carl; it was kind of thee, and thou hast our heart's gratitude; but come no more, as thou valuest thy life."

"Thou callest me boy; it is unkind of thee, my playmate. Wist ye not that I am turning a full score, and my majority cometh within the year. If I protect thee not, and my life be the wager, then claim thou the wager."

"Thou wilt always be a boy to me, Carl. Sweet companions have we been in the short years that have so quickly flown. I would not wound thy brave heart for a king's wealth."

"Will I never be a man to thee?" he sighed. As he said this, her words created an unrest in his heart that he could not explain; but youth, hopeful youth, made her words a talisman that charmed his soul.

"Never, Carl, wilt thou be a man to me. I shall remember thee always as my playmate. Thou art not of lofty stature, like—well, never mind whom." Her face flushed as she said this.

"Like whom, Florette?"

"Like other men, young sir; forsooth, a good cubit couldst thou add to thy frame to thy advantage."

"Oft great souls abide in smaller bodies. Wot ye not that circumstances make events, and events make history? Be not unkind, thou queen of my soul. I can but love thee, and thou canst not say me nay."

"What hast thou, Carl, in the bundle that resteth at thy feet, and 'twas for this thou camest?" She said this to change the flow of thought that was so painful to her.

"I quite forgot thee, sweet playmate. Here is a willow twist of eggs, two loaves of fresh brown bread and some cheese and fish, and I bear thee mother's warm greeting."

"Carl, well thou knowest I will not enjoy a single

mouthful of what thou bringest. The risk illy repays the nobleness of the deed. Thou hast the extreme ill-will of our enemies. They forgave thee thy first offense; a second will not be condoned."

"List to that which will please thy soul. Father Leonard hath provided the means that will bring to thee a low mass; thy mother, as well as thyself, is included in the privilege. The smaller matters are well attended to; thou hast naught to fear."

A flush of pleasure lighted the maiden's face; the hope of again meeting her lover came like a great ray of joy.

"This is goodly news thou tellest to me, and 'twere well worth a kiss, which I give to thee."

"To-night be thou at the break in the old sea wall, when the tower bells strike the midnight hour. I will row thee to the pier. Naught disturbs the drowsy slumber of these canting roundheads; all will be well."

When he had passed from sight in the underbrush, the maiden sat long on the great rock, and mentally thought.

"Alas! good youth, had another not won my love, how loyal could I be to thee. That I bring not misery to his brave heart goeth forth as a prayer."

The Widow Deycourt and her daughter were at the appointed place just as the tower chimes sounded on the midnight air. Carl muffled his oars; the steady dip scarcely made a ripple in the waters of the bay. The boat was lightly fastened to the pier. Three mortals glided like ghosts through the silent streets up to the Cathedral door.

"Carl, this is indeed kind of you, my son," the widow whispered in a cautious tone of voice as they entered the church by a narrow side door that led directly up to

the altar, upon which the solitary lamp that was never extinguished cast its dim shadows upon the little group.

"The old burgh is as quiet as a graveyard. Fear naught; here comes Father Leonard. When the mass is ended, we will slip out and none will be the wiser."

The widow's mind was filled with the solemn thoughts of the hour. The deprivation made the service more impressive as the solemn words fell on her attentive ears. Not so devotional was her daughter, whose truant thoughts were in the monastery. Often her glances would stray to the great black curtain that the confessional made so dear to her.

The mass was ended. Without trouble or danger the trio crept towards the bay and embarked. No suspicious sound made them look fearfully around. Not till the boat touched the old sea wall did they breathe freely.

"Carl, we beseech thee to tarry with us till the morrow, then thou canst return by the gateway. I fear for thee, Carl," the widow said. "If thou wilt not stay with us, linger in the grotto till dawn."

"How shall I account me for the boat? God wot but I wish not the devil's mark to adorn my breast, even in so good a cause. It would be my swift condemnation in yon old burgh. It were best to return the boat to her moorings, then all suspicion will be quieted. God be with thee, Florette; I shall see thee anon."

He turned the boat's prow towards the bay and drifted out with the tide. A dozen of steady strokes sent him to the ninth pier. He secured the bow to its iron ring, and crept cautiously under the pier, where Nattie read the despatches. His listening ear caught the echo of a footstep; then another, and still another. A pitchpine torch was lighted, and his presence was discovered.

"Come forth, thou youngest son of Belial, ere I come and fetch thee from thy hole. These old knees have a certain stiffness that rusts the hinges of youth, else had I captured the devil's own as well as thyself. Misguided boy, the evil one has cast his spell upon thee, thou hast become a criminal in Dantima. In the King's name, I arrest thee. That I came too late to catch the woman and girl brings a greater sorrow to my heart. In good sooth shalt thou suffer for this second transgression."

"Say not thou in the King's name; thou mockest the claims of justice."

"Be not overbold of speech to Dantima's displeasure, thou miscreant. Come, I will e'en cool thy heated blood in this damp cell until the morrow, when thou shalt face the assembly and make thy defence."

The turning of the ponderous key shot the bolts into their sockets, and Carl was a prisoner. The walls were the walls of a palace to him. The persecution would make him a hero in the eyes of Florette. In his joy he sang and shouted like a madman, till the prison-keeper noised it abroad that the youth was daft. For this reason the burgher's anger was turned to pity.

Dantima was early astir. Trials were of such rare occurrence that wonder made meddling curiosity a virtue. Calmly the boy returned the stares that were turned in his direction. There was a solemn quietness in these burghers that was in keeping with the verdict that each deposited in the judge's hat.

He received the written verdict with composure. No emotional feeling betrayed the joy he felt that the sentence was so light. Visions of the dreaded executioner's lash made him nervous. He had even schooled his nerves to stand the trying ordeal. He walked with a firm step

and bold bearing to the pillory, whose steps he mounted, and thus was elevated above the throng of upturned faces that made grimaces at him.

The pillory was shaped like the letter "T." The cross beam was composed of two parts that were hinged at one end and closed with a lock at the other end. Carl's head and hands were thus imprisoned high enough to keep his body in a strained, standing posture; the holes that permitted his hands and head to move in a restricted manner did not allow the weight of his body to rest firmly on his feet. Thus imprisoned, he received calmly the jeers and taunts of these roundheads.

All day the merciless crowd heaped reproach upon him by shouting: "Carl! Carl! loves the cliff maiden, and has sold his soul to the devil. Shame to thee! shame to thee! Are other maidens' faces not as beautiful in Dantima? Fie upon thee, that thou makest covenant with the evil one!"

Another voice in the throng shouted: "Does the devil's elbow stick into they side? His broth is seasoned with dead men's bones, to make the lights burn blue."

A third voice drawled: "How dost thou like it up there? Does the wood hurt thy neck? Shake hands and come down, that thou mayst learn a useful lesson. Dantima's laws are not to be so lightly broken."

A fourth voice exclaimed: "Carl, call thou on the devil to aid thee; he is thy master. Hear him; such friends hast thou for the price of beauty. The ransom will be redeemed in hell. Shame! shame! Carl! Call thou loudly on the ghosts of yon cottage, they will come to thee."

A sudden stillness fell upon the air. The coldness made these mockers shiver. A strange feeling of awe silenced the jeering words. The town was filled with

strange noises, as if a thousand unseen forms were hurrying to and fro. Groans and shrieks came from everywhere. Doors slammed, windows rattled and pandemonium ruled the hour.

The terror-stricken burghers fled from their homes in dismay and rested at a safe distance outside the walls.

Carl was alone in the silence of the town. He stood the ordeal with a hero's soul, but human weakness was stronger than human resolution. A number of times the faintness of death crept over his numbed faculties. The jaws had a firmer set as he banished the pain that would have been a challenge for further persecution. The dear face of his mother came to him. Her hands trembled with suppressed excitement as she climbed the steep steps and stood by her son. She swung back the iron hasps and raised the upper part of the top cross-beam. When Carl's head and hands were released, he sank in a heap on the platform.

He struggled to his feet, embraced his mother, and pleaded: "Do not tell Florette I fainted. The town is deserted, and no one but thee saw me faint." The family carried him home and put him into his bed. For a week he was fever-stricken; his sensitive nerves were severely shaken up. His father, who was versed in the leeches craft, bled him and administered healing herbs, to the betterment of his condition.

A sweet message from Florette, stealthily delivered by Nattie, brought the glow of health to his cheek and the wonted brightness to his eyes. The family, as well as himself, were prisoners in their own house, because the fright the burghers received opened up a new channel of persecution. The alchemist became a target for a hundred ghoulish mutterings. His forge with its red flames

was the devil's cauldron. The strange books on his shelves no one could understand; the schoolmaster had inspected them, and with a wise shake of the head said that every page was filled with the evil one's own marks.

Through the (so-called) black art Carl was saved; he had not fulfilled the measure of punishment that the court of Dantima decree. A wholesome awe made the alchemist respected. Little he cared for the storm of indignation that menaced him; neither cared he for the idle threats that died with the borning. He bent more closely over his crucibles and dreamed his life away in pursuit of chimerical shadows that always went before.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KING'S MESSENGER RECALLED BY KING CHARLES.

Sir Jasper was in his cell, a prey to the harrowing feelings that fluctuated between hope and despair. While he was thus brooding over this mockery of existence, a gentle touch on his shoulder made him look up. Father Leonard was standing by his side, whose benevolent face came to his heart like a soft westerly breeze; his presence was soothing, and for a time the cavalier monk forgot his sorrows.

"My son, be of good cheer, the King's trooper cometh posthaste to find thee. Be not cast down, a bright future awaits thee, and Dantima will soon be a painful remembrance. Thou hast an abiding friend in me; I will be with thee always. Thou shalt hear the whisperings of my love even in foreign lands, and to thy soul's betterment."

"Holy father, does he wait without?"

"The attenuated lad from the Custom House brought the message. The trooper knoweth ere this of thy concealment, and approacheth e'en now, as I hear the sharp jingle of his spurs on the flags in the corridor."

"Father, the matter must be urgent. Ah! here is Aubrey. God wot but is it thou, good Comrade Aubrey? My very soul feedeth on thy looks. It is a four years' turn since last these eyes beheld thee."

"Sir Jasper, what doeth thou in this old rookery, and thou wearest a priestly garb, and yet thy locks smack of the flavor of discontent? Explain thyself and let's be gone."

"Dost thou bring me good tidings from His Majesty, and I will answer thee?"

"The King has fretted like some ill-starred moth for thy return. Throw aside this scarecrow gown, forsake thy sombre cell and the brightest smiles of King Charles' court awaiteth thee."

"Aubrey, speak not thus of these sacred robes, that may not be so lightly cast from me; for these folds hide that which incurred the King's displeasure; these folds hide the cursed, baleful letter that maketh my presence a show for the over-curious."

"And thou goest not hence, Sir Jasper, when stirring times make stirring blood? Hast thou not heard of seditions that threaten good King Charles' throne?"

"Naught hath come to me but the confessions of the penitents, whose woes are as summer clouds to mine. Tell me further, good Aubrey."

"Cromwell and his shaven pates are mustering in force. The King seeketh a foreign ally, and he knoweth not who his friend may be at court. Ah, well he counteth on thee and thy good sword."

And well he may, good Aubrey, unto the utmost will I serve His Majesty, and think lightly of the service."

"Come, leave this old town with its bats and cobwebs. All the money in the royal exchequer would not bide me here. A stout trooper hath an extra steed for thee; we will away at once."

"Thou knowest not what thou asketh, Aubrey. Dost thou forget my churchly vows that end only with death?"

"Cheer up, man, the world is what thou maketh it, a graveyard or a palace. I can well be sworn the pleasures of the world are not dead within thy heart, since yon clustering curls belie thy sacred garb. A shaven crown

would be more in keeping with thy vows. 'Tis some masquerade that can keep for riper years. What sayeth thou?"

"And make a scarecrow of my presence at court. His Majesty is over-punctilious, as thy knoweth; but for the Queen's intercession, my head had paid the forfeit for a misfortune that came to me at his bidding."

" 'Tis not thine to say me nay. By our lady, it is the King's command, and it is thy duty to obey. It is not a matter of vows. Sir Winfred received His Majesty's displeasure for not finding thee."

"If the King so commands, by my rood I will follow thee within the hour."

"The horses are blown and need rest. I will be at yon old gate at high noon. Make thy peace with thy brothers and we will be off. By my faith, thou speaketh like a man and a soldier, not the slave of beads and prayer."

When the cavalier withdrew, Sir Jasper returned to his reverie, that had a tinge of suspicion intermingled with his loyalty. Well he knew the fickleness of the King, who made promises only to break them. Then the thought came to him that the King would probe for the secret that was buried in his heart or send him to the Tower, the secret that held the lives of the widow and her daughter in suspense.

The cavalier monk hastened to seek Father Leonard, whose head was bowed in prayer, wrestling, perhaps, at the sanctuary for the light that would make every doubt a certainty. When the holy father finished, he turned to the King's messenger and spoke: "Right well I know the thought that troubleth thy mind. Go, my son, I have no power to say thee nay. The tidings from London is

but the foreshadowing of my desire to see thee happy. Ah! right well have I noticed the storms that swept thy soul till it was as barren as the deserts that tempt thee to further madness; even there will I be with thee." He laid his fatherly hand on the messenger's shoulder and continued: "What pleaseth me most is the revelation that thy soul is pure, and thy allegiance as steadfast as the stars."

"Alas! good father, for the vows I have taken, the breaking thereof sitteth heavily on my conscience."

"Tut! tut! my son; art thou not in the service of the Church, to do her bidding? When thou art sorely tempted, and thou yieldest, then hast thou broken thy pledge to the Church."

"Where is the rosary I gave to thee? I would see it."

"Father, forgive me, I gave it to the maiden on the cliff. 'Twas thou that sent me thence, to the tempting of my soul. And, father, I forgot my vows for the nonce. If I fall, help thou me to my uprising."

"Thou hast my forgiveness and my blessing; I will be with thee, my son, as thou shalt learn. God's blessing be upon thee; and now, farewell."

It lacked yet four hours ere the dial in the square cast no shadow. Half waking and half dreaming, he passed through the gateway and onwards to the grotto. The little gurgling echoes of the brook filled the cave with its own sweet music. Florette was not there. He glanced upwards at the now well-worn pathway that had wrecked a thousand hopes. As the time was short, he climbed hastily up, up, until he stood at the cottage door, where he met the widow carrying an earthen pitcher that was empty.

"Welcome, father; I go even now to the spring for

water; tarry thou until my return. My daughter rejoiceth that thou wilt administer spiritual consolation that falleth as manna from the sky."

"It is manna to me, and feedeth my famished heart, thou dear one of my soul," Florette exclaimed, and continued: "Go to the grotto and perform thy good offices for mother, then I will follow."

Ere the widow had reached the spring that bubbled at her feet the monk was with her. He took the pitcher from her hand and set it by the side of the depression that was shaded with moss. "Kneel, my daughter," he said. "This will be the last confession that I will give to thee here, as I am ordered hence.

" 'Tis thus we give up to our sore discomfort. Alas! how cruel is the world, where to be misunderstood is a crime. How deeply has this come home to me, no one but God and myself know.

"Father Leonard will not forget thee. Another will take up the duty. Have thou no fear and confess thy heart's promptings to me for the time is short." When the duty had been performed she filled her pitcher and went slowly up the pathway to the cottage.

Then a quicker step approached. How it harrowed his soul to speak the words that made his voice husky with emotion. Her face was all aglow with hope and pleasure; her eyes bright with expectation. With one mad impulse he pressed her to his heart as if the treasure was too sacred for human tempting. "Ah! but I love thee, girl, and yet what I say to thee will wring thy soul with anguish."

"With anguish, sayest thou. How may this be? And the burghers will say thee nay, as to thy coming hither."

"A messenger from the King even now awaits my com-

ing." With suffering calmness he added: "This day we must part."

"And is it so, my lover? There is a numbness that seizeth me, and my hopes are crushed with the imparting of thy news. Farewell to Florette's happy day, then comes Florette's poor night."

"Nay! nay! dear one, there is hope yet left. Do not undo the brave resolve that makes the future seem as a moment in time's calendar. Shall fate be more unkind and steal the future with its buds of promise? I will interest the Queen for my unchurching; implore her good offices at Rome, and lay aside these robes which make our union impossible. Thence to Arabia, that land of hot airs and burning sands, where the ghostly mystery that blazes here will fade that I may live again and love thee, thou treasure of my life."

"How knowest thou this?"

"Seest thou this parchment. The strange letter is here and there and everywhere. Thinkest thou that a year's absence will chill such love as thine and mine." He clasped the little cold hand in his, and with tearless silence read in the steadfast gaze the suffering that dumbly plead in every hopeless look. Bravely she withheld the tears that made her face more wan and white. With childish abandon she threw her arms around his neck and gazed into his eyes to prove his soul.

"Seest thou aught there to doubt? They only prove to thee the depths of my unalterable love. Canst thou ask more?"

"Nay, but it is a goodly truthful soul; one I would trust forever."

"May the foul fiend scorch it with this letter, if my

heart proves not true to thee, and the love that is heaven born."

"Make not such speech, thou loved one. Recall such utterings that make me doubt thy love. Unsay them for my sake."

"Forget that they came from my lips. Love that is sealed with such pledges finds an unhappy ending, and I bethink me the hottest fires are soonest cooled. So sayeth the proverb."

"Father! lover, I will trust thee with my life. In trusting thee, thou hast the love that is my life; nay, more, it is my all."

"Knowest thou not that the secret thou and thy mother keepeth within the tabernacle of the soul is known to me; knowest thou not that King Charles would give an earldom for the knowledge in my possession. Go not to yon heathen town at thy utmost peril, for the courtiers may see thy face and know thee for what thou art. Keep by thee speedy means of departure. Some one at court hath knowledge of thy retreat; so be prepared, and I will meet thee in Rome. Give to me thy address and I will write it here."

"In heaven's name how knowest thou this?"

"His Majesty will send his troopers hither to destroy thee. Seest thou the signs of the times on the decks of yon war ships that have harbored here since the troubles began? They have orderings that make preparation a duty. A wager with thee that thou stayest not six months."

"Thou wilt meet me in Rome. How the thought cheers my heart, for the time seemeth not so long."

"Should aught of danger threaten thee, thou light of my soul, I give to thee my London address. How shall

I get to thee tidings of events that will make my existence a stirring mystery. Alas! there is no way, and faith must be the guerdon of our love. Kneel thou by my side, with thy fair young face uplifted to yon gray cross, and with thy hand in mine renew the solemn pledge that is recorded in heaven. Nay! nay! no tears. Keep them for thy solitude; else they would unman me. I would be strong in my resolve to do that which seemeth best for our welfare."

"I will! I will! See; I even smile to cheer thee. A year will quickly pass, and then—and then the troubles will end. I will dream of that hour that will unite us and make our lives a dream."

He gave one hasty glance at the sky and noted the shadows how they sought refuge 'neath the trees, and sighed: "There are no shadows on yon aged dial; they are in our hearts, and I must be gone."

For full ten minutes Florette was clasped in his strong arms. With one long kiss he set her on the mossy bank and fled as if the tormenting devils were pursuing him; nor looked he backwards till the grotto was a memory.

He strode onward through the woods, up the hill, past the gate, and into the arms of Father Leonard, who was alarmed at his condition.

"Stay, my son, thy face betokens fever; 'twere well to tarry till the morrow. Thou needest the leeches' craft and some soothing lotions."

"Father, I kneel for thy blessing, and will be off. The King hath sore need of my service. This unrest is beyond the leeches' cure."

With a hasty embrace he rushed from the monastery and moved with long steps to the gate, where the horses were in waiting, and without saying as much as by your

leave, he threw himself into the saddle, buried the rowels of his spurs into the flanks of his steed and rode down the road with the speed of an arrow. His cowl and hood streamed in the breeze like a banner. Onward he rode; trees, rocks and ravines flew by them like a flash, while the plunging horses, with their bold riders, swept onwards at a thundering pace. The yeomanry stared in wonder at the mad monk and his gay companions that never drew rein till twenty good English leagues lay between them and Dantima.

"God wot, Sir Jasper, how thou ridest. The speed taketh my breath; it is not an ambling monkish gait that sendeth thy steed forward at such a pace. His Majesty's troopers, and thou in the lead, could charge the world and distance the whirlwind. I will commend thee to His Grace as the best seat in the saddle, as the best trooper in his realm."

"Aubrey, forgive my churlish mood. This letter on my breast makes me a misanthrope. My blood is as feverish as the hottest fire. We have been friends too long. Thou knowest me well."

"I am content to have thee at court; thy fiercest storms are summer flaws. Thou art in high favor with His Majesty, and high honors await thee. Throw off the gloom that fitteth thee as some ill-starred garment and make double amends for thy long absence."

"Aubrey, I fear me much that disappointment awaits thee. The King will send me on a mission, or condemn me to the Tower; then, bethink thee, my solemn life hath quenched the frivolity that once made life so gay?"

"By my troth, thou messenger of the King, I will well be sworn that wine and woman's eyes will brush the cobwebs from thy burdened wit that was wont to sparkle with some peculiar charm."

"These robes make wit some buried hermit that feedeth on his own hard penances. Do they not remind thee of that solemn hour that cometh alike to all? I wish to play no marplots' score with thy unfettered happiness. The sooner I am ordered away the better for me."

"A woman's smile for thy cell; a woman's wit for thy long prayers, and wine for the spirits that haunt graveyards, and love for the passing of the dreary hours that kill the joy of living. A single day in Dantima would mar a century of happy hours."

These gay sentiments were lost on the King's messenger, whose preoccupied thoughts were rambling over the wide field of recent events that made the old burgh a nest of sweet memories. He could not forget Father Leonard, whose grand heart was filled with such gentle mercies. Neither could he forget the patient alchemist who lived in his own imaginative world. Florette's sweet face, the inspiration of his soul, was with him always. The words that said: "Come to me, thou art mine," haunted him like a troubled dream.

"Sir Jasper, deep thoughts make silent tongues. Here have we been riding these two good hours, and not a spoken word to break the silence. Have it thy way, I will whistle the love ditty that last vibrated in the chamber of my lady. Keep thou thy tongue for merrier hours."

"Heed me not, Aubrey, for my soul is heavy. Words seem out of place. Have thou thy merry ditties and thy love songs that maketh thy heart glad."

"Thanks to our lady, the journey is almost ended. We are nearing the gates of London. His Majesty will thank me, that I brought thee to him without loss of time."

CHAPTER IX.

THE WIDOW DEYCOURT AND HER DAUGHTER PRISONERS.

WHEN the king's messenger rushed hurriedly away Florette sank down lower on the moss-covered rock and wept till her eyes were heavy. Life seemed to be robbed of its brightness. With a heavy heart she bended over the spring and bathed her lids in the cooling water. She plunged her face into the pool to cool the fever that was consuming her; then she arose and wearily climbed the hill and went about her daily duty as if her heart was dead.

The news that Nattie brought created a diversion that strengthened her resolution, because dangers thickened around them. How anxiously the cliff dwellers awaited the coming of the unnamed ship that flew the English flag.

"Mamma, if papa does not come in the next three days we are lost. The burghers have discovered that the cottage can be approached during the hours of daylight. The priest that Father Leonard sent to thee was followed. Carl's coming was a misfortune that bears its bitter fruit."

"Why dost thou say three days, my son?"

"Bethink thee, in three days the moon will be in her darkest shadow, else papa would not venture to sail into the very jaws of danger. If he cometh not then, a month hence will find us dead, or in prison."

Florette raised her head and faltered: "Brother, hast thou forgotten the depths of the cavern. How will they find us?"

"If they leave one stone on another it will be because they have not the strength to destroy. Then where is thy refuge?"

"Who gave thee such tidings, my brother?"

"Who but Carl gave to me these warnings. They make bold of speech to say that the Devil's Elbow and its cottage shall rest in the bottom of the sea, stone by stone, even unto the foundation."

"Monsters!" the maiden gasped. "Where are the guardian spirits that make the cheeks of Dantima's citizens turn pale with fear? I wot not that they measure lances with the unseen world."

"And well I wot that these good spirits that befriended Carl when he stood bravely at the pillory would cast them headlong from the cliff to follow where the house would be. Fear not, my sister. All of the king's troopers will not prevail against them."

"Carl was tortured in the pillory for us. Foolish boy, how heavily the hand of persecution fell upon him. Even now he cometh in hot haste to warn us of the evil."

Carl's face was flushed with the hasty steps that brought him safely by the three tall elms, where his practiced eyes saw the first signs of real danger. A small fire of twigs had charred with the service they rendered, and the white ashes of the consumed fagots indicated that ten intruders sat around the cheerful blaze that was hidden by a depression in the rivulet's high bank. They were not troopers, else had the boot heels been high and narrow. The flat, broad heels of the peasantry gave to this boy the evidence that made the peril near.

He sat for a moment breathless with the exertion, and stammered: "Hast thou no refuge but this? Thou and thine must away ere the crafty burghers are upon thee.

Even now these eyes did see the marks upon the blue mud that telleth me that the glen is invaded. Daylight hath no alarms for these that seek to destroy thee."

"Carl, there is no shelter that we can claim. Friendless thou knowest we are, and friendless we will be, unless our guardian spirits cast their sheltering arms around us."

"Fie upon thee, Florette. How sayest thou the word friendless. Am I not with thee? And in my mind there springeth good suggestions that will save thee and thine. List thou to the pleadings of my heart, and make thee ready to move to-night ere the clock in the tower striketh the tenth hour."

"What hast thou to offer, Carl? Thou art but a boy with all the courage of a man, and may Heaven bless thee for thy good offices."

"Thou must know that our humble dwelling is at thy service. The rooms are in good preparation for thee. There thou wilt be secure from danger. The sleeping dolts will ne'er seek thee, and thou so near."

"Carl, thou forgettest the gateway to Dantima. The dankish streets, with their sombre dwellings, have sharp eyes and a thousand ears. What sayest thou? The venture would be an act of a madman."

"Softly, thou light of my eyes. As thou knowest, our house abuts the great wall of the town. High up there peepeth a window, unused for years. The cobwebs curtained it, to the discomfort of the foolish flies. In good sooth, it is as clean as the good housewife's floor, and awaits a welcome for thee and thine."

"Thou leadeth us into the very jaws of Satan and his minions. Carl, Carl, shouldest thou counsel us to our misfortune, how heavy would be thy heart!"

"The boldness of the move maketh safety doubly an assurance."

"Is the peril then so near, my playmate?"

"Else hadst thou not seen me here. Well did these good ears hear these bigots plotting for thy capture. Beware of the spring, for a promise of poison makes the use thereof a caution. Carry whilst thou mayst a full allotment of water to thy habitation. I forget me, thou hast a well, and could withstand a goodly siege."

While they were counseling together, Nattie and the dog came quickly to the grotto, and said, as he patted the faithful hound on the head: "Carl is right. Dareall smelleth the danger that is near. We have little time to squander. What must be done, t'were well t'were done quickly."

"Be at the three elms by ten. I will await thee there," saying which Carl moved hurriedly through the underbrush towards Dantima.

Nattie brushed back the gray locks from his mother's forehead and chided: "Mamma, Carl is over-zealous. True that we are surrounded by enemies. Yet I count on papa's reaching his loved ones in time to transport us hence. If thou goest to yon burgh, Dareall and I will watch for the signals, and guide his brave bark through His Majesty's war dogs, even unto us."

The household effects were safely packed for speedy flight, and every item that thought could anticipate was accounted for in the reckoning.

With cautious steps the fugitives pushed through the sombre woods, guided by the unerring instinct of the faithful animal that ran hither and thither with his cold nose close to the ground; then he would return and rub his head upon the hand of Nattie, and trot forward at a

brisk pace till the shadow of the three elms sheltered them. Carl was there; he moved across the King's highway, with Florette and her mother close behind him. The sound of horses' hoofs quickened their speed, until the town was skirted, and the high walls were in front of them, they were gloomy in their heaviness.

A stout rope was lowered from the embrasure, the maiden placed her feet firmly in the loop, and was drawn easily upwards. She was carefully lifted to the stone sill and was drawn inwards. The widow followed her child in the same manner, then Carl came last; the cord was withdrawn, and these wanderers fell to weeping, one with the other.

A word of caution from the lad tempered their emotions, though Carl knew it not. A relationship existed between them that time had concealed; some family trouble that was yet to make them all unhappy by the knowing; but this night was a happy termination of the sorrow, so far as these women were concerned.

"Make thou no unseemly noise, my dear ones. Thou knowest the proverb, that walls have ears. Whisper what thou wouldst say, and whisper low, for Burgher Pegall liveth close by, whose tongue runneth faster than his wit. He hath sharp ears for gossip, and is over-curious in matters that pertain more to his neighbors than the matters that should be of his own overseeing. On thy lives venture not to the windows, and keep closely to these sheltering walls, and thou shalt be reunited to thy own within the week."

"Carl, thou art a good son; thou pleaseth me well. Keep thou on the watch for Nattie, and let his movements be thy careful study, and God will reward thy generous deeds with ample recompense."

"Fear thou not; my rod and line will befriend me, and bring thee good report in all due season, and thus make distrust a scarecrow."

While Carl was thus fulfilling to the utmost his promises, the three friends were living again in the years. All the differences that enstranged these relatives were settled by a candor that gave the lie to slander, but a religious fervor overcame them, and regardless of Carl's warning, they stole forth to seek the consolation of the Church.

The dark of the moon was near them. Like ghosts they stole along the deserted streets, up to the carved door of the Cathedral, which was easy of entrance. Father Leonard was in his rectory. The dim light of the lamp fell upon his benevolent countenance like a halo of light. His thoughts were deeply buried in the parchments that were spread out before him; yet his ears were not unmindful of the movements in the chancel. He arose to confront these intruders that came betimes to worship.

"Is it thou, my persecuted ones, that cometh to me at this questionable hour, when thou shouldst be miles away on the sea, where thy safety lies? Knowest thou not that the stake and fagot await thee if thou art apprehended? Lose not a moment, but fly, ere it be too late."

"Father, thou knowest not the joy that filleth our hearts, for the sorrows that broke two families asunder are happily ended, we would ask thy blessing, and we will be gone."

"May God's blessing be with thee, my children; now go if thou lovest me. My heart is heavy with the thought. Secret musterings that bode thee no good rule the hour. The Cathedral is closely watched. I will make the rounds

to make assurance sure." He returned and added: "Go, my daughters, the way seemeth clear."

Like animals pursued by a relentless hunter, they hastened to gain the shelter that was a haven to them. Every footstep was a fetter to tighten the coils of misfortune.

A voice from the darkness halted them, as it bellowed: "In the King's name, what wenches be these that disturb the midnight stillness of Dantima?" With these words he placed his forefinger and thumb in his mouth and gave a shrill whistle that echoed with startling distinctness through the silent streets. Hurrying feet came nearer; a flambeau threw its weird glare on the group; a shout went up from the ruffian's throat as he hoarsely growled: "As I live, it is the devil's offering to Dantima. Right glad am I that thou cometh to my net, for thou hast saved us the catching. Now, by Cromwell and the Commonwealth, dearly thou payest for the venture."

Terror-stricken, they followed this fanatic to the prison. With a thundering blow on the oaken panel with his huge fist, he brought the jailor to the entrance, and turned these helpless females over to him, for the laws of Dantima had yet to be satisfied.

They were locked within the mouldy dungeon of the Town Hall. The dampness made them shiver as they drew closer together in one corner of the narrow cell that was not so gloomy because a long, narrow slit in the wall admitted the heart-cheering rays of moonlight that made little silver squares on the roughly-hewn sides. They could not peer through the opening, because its distance from the floor made such a movement impossible. With upturned faces they gazed at the small patch of dark sky, and wept.

"Alas! daughter, what have we done, or rather, what have we not undone? What madness must have taken possession of our senses. After all of Carl's unselfish kindness, we have again placed his life in jeopardy, and not only his life, but our own lives as well. We cannot hope for mercy from these iron-hearted roundheads. Didst thou heed the threats that taunted us in our helplessness?"

Florette spake reassuringly: "Mother, bethink thee, the Council may be more merciful. The ruffian spoke as one that hath small authority in the affairs of this fanatical burgh. Cheer thee, for the punishment may be small."

The widow did not reply, but sat on the edge of the rude couch, with her hands clasped in prayer. Florette could not know the thoughts of her mother, for this reason both were silent. The girl's mind was filled with tender yearnings. How swiftly her thoughts traveled to the hero of her soul, the King's messenger, who was even now in the court of King Charles. "And this is the end of such a promise for the future."

They could not sleep, but thought and thought, until the gray streaks of dawn made objects around them dimly visible. Then the yellow sun-rays came more broadly. They were near to the Council chamber of Dantima. The sound of busy feet, coming and going, made their hearing doubly acute, but they could not see these solemn-visaged men, with their steeple-crown hats and cloaks, their shorn locks, and their untrimmed beards, march so rigidly into the hall and take their seats. A psalm from the Bible was read by the oldest member of the session; then the trial of these helpless women commenced.

This widow and her daughter could not see the secret

ballot that was taken again and again. Some thoughts of mercy still softened their iron hearts. The burly covenanter that arrested them swayed the minds of the wavering, and the sentence was death by fire and fagot.

Nothing could touch the bigoted hearts of these stern men, who deemed the act a service rendered to God. It was a gala day in Dantima. The news that came forth from the assembly was received with joy, and the burgh's streets were filled with the morbid cravings of brutal human nature.

The Goliath of these Philistines made merry with the misery, as he blustered: "It is for thee, thou Papist followers of the devil, that I plant this strong hewing in the ground that we may bind thee securely back to back, for I wish not to cheat the flames that hunger for thy blood. A merry feast 'twill be for the damnable spirits that haunt yon height, to Dantima's disliking."

While he was thus mouthing these inhuman utterances, he was busy digging the hole that was to support one end of the post. The idle, gaping crowd stood by and applauded his wit. Hither and thither these meddlers scurried to gather the dryest fagots for the holiday, where mirth made mercy a mockery.

Carl heard the unwonted shouts of the burghers that the east wind brought so sharply to his ears. A great fear fell upon him. The safety of Florette and her mother came to him like some dreadful intuition. Without acquainting Nattie of his intentions, he hurried to Dantima, where his worst fears were realized. As the burghers knew not how the women gained admittance to the town, Carl and his family were safe from persecution.

The alchemist's son was hooted at, and jeered at, as he hastened across the square to find Father Leonard. He

heeded naught of this senseless abuse. His thoughts were with Florette and her mother. The cruel preparations made him shudder. Without even so much as an obesiance to the father, he acquainted him of the prisoners' danger.

"Father, knowest thou not that the dwellers of the cliff are condemned to death? And I wot not how they were discovered. Hasten thou to the Governor's and plead thou for delay."

The abbot shook like an aspen leaf when these tidings passed into his ears. "Sayest thou, my son, that they will burn them at the stake? Then will I call down the vengeance of God and Heaven on their cruel heads."

"Haste thou, father, the Council is yet at its sitting. Stay this execution but for a day and I will save them, or my life shall be the forfeit."

"Make not such covenants; 'tis sinful in God's sight. I will to the sacristy and don my robes, and summon the brotherhood."

Solemnly this religious order, clothed in the vestments of the Church (in close ranks), filed into the gothic assembly hall, where these bearded men sat upon an elevated platform that had no other adornments but the rude benches where they sat in judgment. Biased by the promptings of human hate, no agitation marked their demeanor, as they listened with attention to the eloquent pleadings of the abbot.

"Thy request is granted. Without abatement these culprits break the laws of Dantima; yet sayeth we not nay to thy request. One day's delay will neither make nor break the verdict that seemeth just in our eyes."

The Church's good offices were refused to these (the condemned ones) that waited in agony for the moment of

execution. Father Leonard departed as he came, his heart filled with misgivings for the promises of the alchemist's son, whose boyish enthusiasm carried him beyond the bounds of reason.

Carl's brave heart was overjoyed that the widow and her daughter had a respite. Filled with enthusiasm, he turned to the alchemist for help. Yet turned he not in vain. The chemist, with a show of impatience, said to his boy:

"Why cometh thou to disturb my busy thoughts? And the formula that would make us beyond the pale of want hath flown from me. Fie on thee, for thy rude intrusion."

"My father, put by thy dreamings for the while. Two dear lives depend on thy skill. Florette and her mother are condemned to death on the morrow. The stake and fagots are ready for the victims, who cower in terror within the dungeon, hard by the assembly hall."

"My son, 'tis a Christian heart thou hast in thy breast, and God will bless thee to thy dying day for the service thou doeth. Tell me, how can I give thee the aid thou requirest?"

"I wouldst that thou preparest the strange acid that defieth the flames. The formula is here in this bound volume; and I will love thee with all of a son's devotion."

The boy stood at the elbow of his sire while he measured the equivalents with a delicacy that practice made perfect. "I have made thee, my son, that which will be sufficient for twenty score dry fagots, and thou saidst the fagots were dry unto powder. So much the better; the fiber of the fagots will greedily absorb the liquid."

"Art thou sure, dear father, that no error hath crept

into thy reckoning, for human lives depend upon thy skill?"

"Go in peace, my son, the fagots have no power to harm thy friends. Be cautious, lest thou anger the powers that be, to thy misfortune."

The early cocks had not yet crown in the barnyards of the townsmen. The hour was most propitious, for the chains of slumber were heavy on the eyes of these guardians of Dantima. Carl and his mother were up betimes, while the boy, in his bare feet, crept around the corner of the block and secured armsfull of these light fagots and carried them to his mother. She, with diligent care, plunged each particular limb into the liquid, and laid each one by to dry. Thus they labored until the funeral pyre was arranged just as the lad had found it.

Carl embraced his mother with unusual affection and gasped: "Would that I could carry the good tidings to them in the dungeon. The fear may kill them or do them lasting injury. I am powerless to do this good service for them, and I will trust to God to sustain their fortitude."

The alchemist, his wife and Carl saw the sun rise, yet never a wink of sleep had they for watching the preparations from the corner of the building that was yet two squares away from the stake, until the throng obstructed their view. Then they crept into the house to kneel in prayer.

The brutal jailer, with the massive iron key, threw back the strong bolts and bellowed: "Come forth, thou children of the evil one, and look thy last upon the sun, for the time is arrived when thou must yield thy bodies to the earth and thy souls to thy master, the devil. What availeth thee to weep and moan? 'Twill not lighten the

burden of thy endurance. Would that we could serve thy companions on the Devil's Elbow as we serve thee; and must I carry thee to thy destruction."

"Not so, thou beast of a jailer. Lay not thy hands upon us. We have made our peace with God. Thou canst not burn our souls. Lead on, we do but follow thee." They heeded not the merciless goads that came from human tongues, but stepped quickly over the circle of fagots that seemed innocent of foul intent, and were securely bound to the stake, with their backs to each other.

A commotion in the throng stayed the hands that held the rich pine torches. The spectators fell back, and the monks from the monastery filed in to form a circle around the doomed captives.

The solemn voice of Father Leonard rose above the chattering of the citizens. His terrible denunciation chilled them into silence, as he thundered: "My children, ye do greatly err in thy hearts. This brutal murder will be a remorse that will haunt ye to thy dying day. The flames that consume the bodies of thy victims will scorch thy souls with such remorse that life will be a curse and death a never-ending torment. Who among ye will say this one hath an evil spirit, or that one is possessed of the devil? Wist ye not there is but one Judge of men? Dost thou heed the scriptural text, 'Judge not that ye be not judged,' and mark thou, in the last day when the secrets of all hearts are known, how will the record stand with thee when thy soul shall be required of thee?"

The clamor of the throng drowned the further words of Father Leonard, as he advanced and administered the last rites of the church to the widow and her child.

"Burn them! Set fire to the fagots! Go to, thou shaven priest!" was yelled in his ear.

The tall form of Father Leonard towered above the heads of the mob. He raised his hand high over his head and shouted: "Hold, madmen! Ere ye apply the torch, know ye that harm shall not come to these. So do thy worst. God protects the innocent."

"Away with them, and we prove thou liest!" Four lights were thrust beneath the fagots. "Try thou again," shouted the priest. "Did I not tell thee that God is mightier than thou."

Consternation paled the faces of those who came to mock, as they fled to their houses in dismay. "No one accuseth thee," exclaimed Father Leonard. "God and his mercy hath saved thee." While he was thus discoursing, he unbound them. The monks formed in two lines and placed the widow and her child between them, while they moved through the streets. The solemn sound of the "Miserere" echoed through the silent avenues. When the procession reached the gateway, the saved ones passed onwards to the cliff, where King Charles' troopers threatened them with a new danger.

When they reached the sheltering roof of the cottage they fell to weeping; which Nattie misconstrued, for he soothed them with the assurance that the chapel in the old graveyard offered an asylum that would defy detection. "Its ruins shall shelter us until father's return. I bethink me, thou looketh wan. Tell me what hath happened."

Carl sat by the side of his mother and nervously twisted the folds of her dress in a score of shapes. He did this to conceal the anxiety he felt, while he related the details of the danger they had miraculously escaped. "I must go to them at any hazard, my mother. If they

ever needed a friend it is at this moment. These cruel-hearted burghers have no pity in their hearts? When the fear that restrained them is removed they will do Florette and her mother further harm." With an affectionate kiss he hurried to the open country, on through the glen, and never rested till he stood in the presence of the little group, that wept afresh as they related the events that recalled the days of miracles. Carl listened gravely to the end, and yawned:

"How sayest thou, my friends? Wot ye not that Father Leonard ne'er saved thee from the burning? 'Twas my father's skill in compounding strange elements that saved thee; elements that turned the fagots into stone. Right well Father Leonard knoweth this."

"Why sayeth thou this, Carl? To wreck our faith in the Church's power to perform such wonders? Fie on thee, Carl."

"Say not so, good friends. Far be it from me to wreck thy faith in miracles. I do but tell thee the truth. I crept forth from our walls ere the early cock of morn hath crowed and dipped the fagots in the liquid, and replaced them ere the drowsy world of Dantima was astir. 'Tis thus, good friends, that they who do the service ne'er receive the honor."

"Forgive us. Carl. If we owe our lives to thee receive the recompense of three grateful hearts, and call thyself acquit."

"Thou owest much to Father Leonard. My humble efforts in thy behalf were not worth a rushlight without his assistance. But say no more. I have forgotten the old danger in thinking of the new. Oh, that thou wert hence and safe from Dantima's anger."

"Be not thou anxious, Carl. Nattie knoweth of a se-

cure retreat in the ruined chapel, whither we will go till the danger is passed."

"Hark ye, thou persecuted ones. My father's forge did glow with an unwonted flame that had colors so strangely mixed that it did make his very flesh to creep, and I mistake not strange happenings will repay Dantima's reckoning with a lavish hand and to thy safety will contribute. Stay where thou art, my father ne'er strikes amiss."

While they yet spake, the clouds on the horizon of the sea gathered quickly, and spread across the space of the sky; yet no wind bestirred them. The day darkened even to night's blackness, and the air was still; yet came there a coldness upon Dantima that made the burghers shiver. These covenanters, that spared not two helpless women, trembled with dread, as they gazed upon the stake and fagots. No hand would so much as touch them.

The maximum power of the unseen world was yet to make the burgh a visitation that they would remember for generations. Following the chilling cold, an unearthly dampness made the blue flames glow from the cliff with an intenseness that lighted the streets of Dantima. Even the darkest corners shone with a strange shadow that resembled the great northern lights of the poles. Terror-stricken, they huddled together around their cheerless hearths, nor ventured to so much as peep into the deserted streets.

To crown the horror of the day the sea gave up its dead. Phantom ships that hailed from every age and clime, were anchored in the bay. Strange and unique shapes of every pattern on earth were swinging from their cables. Their decks were manned by sailors that spoke every language on earth. The grotesqueness of their attire was in keeping with the scene.

L. of C.

Again Dantima was deserted by its people, that sought refuge in the country. The streets were thronged with ghostly visitors, who entered every house; yet nothing was disturbed. The babel of tongues was continuous, and pandemonium reigned supreme. There was something to indicate the presence of these unearthly visitors. It was the mouldy smell of decayed mortality.

He, of the King's great seal that hung from the wall, was in his usual seat, his drowsy thoughts steeped in beer and tobacco, his assistant was turning page by page the record, whose parchment was discolored with age. This was his duty. Not that the King's exchequer would be benefited thereby—quite the contrary, for sundry packages had been admitted without paying a farthing of duty. His inspection was terminated suddenly by a grunt from his master, who said:

"Rudolf, tell to me where this damp, fishy smell cometh from. Have we bursted barrels in store? Run to the upper rooms and inspect those last invoices that came from over the sea."

As the consignment consisted of two barrels of rum, the lad returned with a prompt report.

"No, sir; we have nothing in the Custom House that smelleth like that. It is dreadful, sir; I can't stand it."

"Egad! my boy! the devil is to pay somewhere. It seemeth to me that the ocean has been turned bottom-side up, and Davy Jones' locker is emptied of its contents. Thy nose, good Rudolf, hath its share of the stink from the size. Go to, and hang such an ornament that none wish for."

"Sir, it is not to my liking, yet it abideth with me till the day of my death, and we have not the choosing of

such members as seemeth best to us, else had I some of thy over-productiveness."

"Well spoken, thou faithful Rudolf. Well am I answered for the pain I gave to thee. Forget it, lad, and we will be quits."

These pleasantries terminated in a surprise that was abrupt. A stranger entered, preceded by a cold current of air that made both men shiver. The clouds of tobacco smoke that made the air stifling were swept away as if by magic. A man in the outfit of a sailor stood by the desk where Rudolf was seated. The Custom House officer sat erect in his arm chair, and stared curiously at the seaman. For a time the tongue of this mountain of fat was silent. As the visitor came on business, he broke the silence by remarking:

"Hello! shipmate! In the name of all that is strange, tell me, where dost thou hail from? Where is thy country? And what port sailed thou from? Thou must have been the Captain of Noah's Ark, else am I a fool? The cut of thy jib and spanker betokeneth this. What hast thou to say for thyself?"

Without noticing these remarks, the stranger gravely inquired for some property that had been left some years ago. The prospect of a fee for the unclaimed plunder sent a thrill of pleasure through the fatness of this officer's body, and he turned with a gracious salutation to Rudolf, and ordered: "Show to him the entry and the charges. Mind ye, Rudolf, not forgetting the storage, which must amount to a considerable sum in good English sovereigns."

"When were they entered for duty, sir? If thou wilt give me this data the duty will be quickly performed. Hast thou a memorandum?"

"It must be now quite three hundred years since the parcels were sent to this port. Now, I bethink me, I left them here myself."

"Left them here thyself, sayest thou?" Rudolf said this in a bewildered way, that made the stranger smile.

"Yea, it seemeth that I have the date in this purse, with other papers of like import." He opened the purse that was fastened to his belt by a rusted chain, and drew from thence a number of documents that had a musty smell. From one of these he produced the slip on which was written, "March the 24th, O. S., 1333," and handed it to the accountant, whose books were indexed with painstaking regularity.

"Thou art right," Rudolf politely answered. "These dates agree to a nicety. Seat thyself, and I will make the amount due by thee to a penny."

"It maketh little matter. Here is a sovereign; that will o'er pay thee. Thy reckoning is worthless." Saying which, he placed in the palm of the clerk's hand the coin that hissed like the seething of steam. A howl from the lad followed. The money burned him as red hot iron. Quickly he dropped it, and stared at the stranger, who was replaced by the skeleton of a dead man.

Rudolf thrust his head and long neck under his desk, and yelled: "Go away from me, thou evil one!" At the same time he sent one leg and then the other flying backwards with savage vigor.

The stranger then walked over to where the proprietor was seated, and said: "Here is thy reward in gold. Hold thou tight to the precious metal, that none may take it from thee."

The fat hand was quickly extended, and as quickly

withdrawn. Again the hissing sound was heard, and the coin fell to the floor, where it disappeared.

"God wot but thou art a ghostly visitor for the making. The Devil's Elbow hath no greater horror." He glanced up as he said this, and stared at vacancy. "Am I dreaming, Rudolf?" As he said this he mopped the great beads of moisture from his brow, while his flesh was likened unto jelly with the quivering. "What meaneth this? See to it, Rudolf, that thou securest the coin that must be on the floor."

"In good sooth, sir; there remaineth but two burnt holes, where the coins dropped. The touch of the devil's wages was as molten lead, and yet it leaveth no mark on my hand. How is it with thee?"

"See thou, my boy, for thy sight is with younger eyes." He extended the huge member, which the clerk examined, and said: "In good sooth, thou hast not the mark that the King's messenger took with him to London town; neither hast thou burn or inflammation."

" 'Tis well, good Rudolf; go thou to the arch and tell me whence cameth the stranger."

A startling cry came from the entrance. The lad ran back trembling in every tall joint. "My God, sir; every ship that ever was built since the world was created is in the bay."

The mountain of fat seemed fairly alive as it ambled to the door, and gazed at the terrifying scene. Then Rudolf gave another yell, and shouted: "The town is full of these spirits." Without waiting for further orders he ran through the streets, yelling like a madman. He heard footsteps behind him, and redoubled his efforts. His joints worked in sections, the length of his stride distanced his pursuer; then a wailing voice reached his ears:

"Don't leave me, Rudolf." As the twain were near the gate, Rudolf halted and waited for his master to come up. "Thou gavest me such a fright, my master, that I will not get over it for a twelvemonth. Methought the devil was after me."

The clerk had a fit of laughing that overcame him. "Didst thou see thyself, thou helpless mass of flesh, swaying from side to side, like a ship in a storm. Come, sit thou on this stump, for thou blowest hard. 'Tis well the moisture cometh freely, or thou wert a dead man to mingle with these shades."

"Rudolf, hast thine eyes ere seen the like? All Dantima is without the walls. Our ship is deserted. I would not venture to return for the wealth of King Charles."

Darkness grew apace, the revelries within the walls waxed louder as the shadows deepened, songs, drinking, and feasting held high carnival, till the clock on the Cathedral tower sounded the hour of midnight, and Dantima was repeopled with frightened mortality again.

The fagots and stake had been removed. Lying on the spot, with their faces turned to the stars, were the brutal jailor and the covenanter that prepared the funeral pyre.

The alchemist was not molested. His son, with the three from the cliff, saw the ships in the bay; saw the grim-visaged faces everywhere. In terror they sat side by side, while a thousand forms glided around them. Yet, did these shadows take no notice of the little group, because their eyes were fixed on the town and its carnival.

"Thou art safe in the cottage, so fear thee not. Dantima hath its lesson that were well worth the learning. I will hasten to my home, that I may see and report to thee. I'll e'en wager a crown that father knoweth naught of this; but still delveth in his crucibles."

CHAPTER X.

THE KING'S MESSENGER MEETS THE DUCHESS, AND IS IMPRISONED IN THE TOWER.

When the King's messenger and Sir Aubrey reached London, their steeds were jaded by the long and heated ride. For this reason they picked their way through the busy thoroughfares.

"Whither goest thou, Sir Jasper—to the King's chambers, or to my apartments?"

"To thy apartments, Aubrey. It mattereth little to me, since these gewgaws are but the vaporings of a dissolute life that hath now no charms for me."

"Sayest thou so, thou hot-headed cavalier monk. Wait till thou seest thy friend, the duchess. A hundred times within the year hath she made inquiry for thee. Heedest thou the sullen discontent that broodeth over London? 'Tis the muttering of the storm that will soon break upon us. The King hath lost his head, and maketh promises to Parliament that he doth not fulfill. These be sorry times, as thou wilt soon learn when thou reacheth court."

When these mud-bedraggled riders brought up sharply at the entrance of the gilded palace of this nobleman (who stood high in the King's favor), they dismounted, and each sought his comfort in a scented bath. When these ablutions were ended, Sir Jasper glanced at the gaudy attire that His Majesty's thoughtfulness had provided. A sneer wreathed his moustached lip. "Must I don these robes to please the King? Then the cursed letter will make me but an idle curiosity, and I shall be angered by

the masquerading that perchance will cost me my head. Thus do I live between hope and fear."

Sir Aubrey surveyed the King's messenger with a right royal pride, as he gave the doublet a better setting from the broad shoulders. "Now will I conduct thee to the King, who waiteth with some impatience for thy coming. What doest thou? A plague upon thy priestly robe that would hide such manly proportions. The unsightly thing flaps around thee like some good housewife's scarecrow that saveth the turnip patch."

"Aubrey, I seek not to tempt His Majesty's hot displeasure, to my undoing. Say no more. I will e'en wear the cowl that I may hide the devil's mark that groweth whiter day by day. Lead on; I will follow by the shortest way to the court."

"The Queen is thy friend. See to it that thou angereth her not. She hath more firmness than her royal consort."

Arm in arm, Sir Aubrey and the King's messenger (whose rich attire was hidden by the sacred robes) passed the palace guard and moved onward through a succession of high arched halls unto the throne room, where King Charles and his court were receiving ambassadors from France. When this ceremony was ended the noblemen knelt at the feet of the royal pair and kissed the extended hand of each with courtly reverence.

"Sir Jasper, thou art right welcome to our presence. We repent us of our displeasure, and reinstate thee in our courtly favor. England can illy spare the services of so true a knight."

The King's eyes rested on the cowl and hood that was thrown back to loosen the curling locks and show his rich attire. His Majesty's eyes flashed with anger as he jested: "Art thou Peter the Hermit, that cometh from

the Holy Sepulcher, or art thou the minstrel that singeth of their knightly deeds?"

"I am neither, Your Majesty; I did but hide the glaring letter that gaveth thee such offence. Wot ye not that I have taken holy orders, else it were a perfidy to wear such robes."

"Tell me, Sir Jasper, is thy sword still loyal to thy King, or does the Church of Rome claim thy allegiance?"

The King's messenger bowed with a peculiar grace, as he replied: "Sire, my sword, my life, and services are thine to command. I am no veering weather-cock, to change with every wind that blows."

"Well said, thou loyal subject of a king. Would that other hearts were as true to our royal person as thou art." With a weary sigh, he glanced around and continued: "Alas! that I should have to say so much."

Then the King turned to Sir Aubrey and said: "To thee our gracious thanks are due for the prompt dispatch of our commission."

"I would bespeak thy sovereign graces for thy messenger, and would recommend that thou be graciously pleased to place him at the head of thy troopers in the onslaught. Such hot-headed riding was ne'er seen. Hills, ravines and hollows swept by us like a flash. I marvel greatly that he reacheth Your Grace with a sound body."

"It was to please his King. A courser's laggard heels would be a poor compliment for a return to kingly favor."

The studied absence of criticism at the court disarmed the morbid disposition that was wont to harrow the messenger's feelings. The cavalier monk regained all of the vivacity that made his presence a charm. Dantima and its ghostly surroundings grew dimmer as the days rolled by. His ambition that basked in royal sunshine bloomed all

the brighter for the dimness that misfortune clouded for a time. The smiles of these court beauties were exhilarating as the effects of wine. The duchess, with a woman's tact, kept him at her side, and in such a manner that it seemed to him that she was using him for some particular purpose. He grew more cautious in his inner humors, and more bold in his outward gallantries. One night, when revelry ruled the hour, and His Majesty's wine flagons were being depleted, the duchess pinned her colors to the silken surface of his doublet, and laughingly said:

"Come, thou man of the silent tongue; I have need of thy gallantry. Right well shalt thou be paid. It is not for other ears. Come thou to Ashton Park on the morrow."

"With a right good grace; should the King have hasty need of my services, then take thou no offence at the absence that must be debtor to duty."

Sir Jasper bethought himself of Florette. The thought brought to him a twinge of remorse. Far back within his memory there came a recollection that the duchess was in some manner related to the idol of his soul, but the scenes were so intermixed with stirring events that his memory failed him, and he dismissed it with reluctance.

The following day this duchess, a court favorite, drove homeward at a rapid gait. She passed under the stone arch that was overgrown with ivy, passed the porter's lodge and drew rein at thedoorway of Ashton Park. Without delay, she changed her rich garments for the comfortable dresses of home, and sat by the cheerful fire that blazed on the hearth, for the fall weather was frosting the flowers. She touched a call-bell at her side and waited for the summons to be answered.

"Take this note to Mr. Dornford, my counselor, and wait for an answer. See to it that he gets same and deliver thou it into his hands. Away with thee. Act with diligence. If he is in London I would know it."

In three hours the postilion returned with not only an answer, but he returned with the advocate himself.

This person that rummaged among the effects at the Custom House in Dantima had not changed in the least particular. The same restless eyes glanced from one object to another with such rapidity that it was hard to study the outlines of his face. He spoke deferentially to the owner of the mansion in a suggestive manner that long acquaintance had cultivated.

"I received the summons, Your Grace. Fortunately, the missive found me at home. I was just leaving for London, where I have some court business that is pressing me sharply. What are thy commands?"

"Many thanks for thy promptness. Well thou knowest that I dislike delay. Be seated near to the fire, as a mist dampeneth thy garments."

"I am all attention to thy wishes."

"Mr. Dornford, it seemeth clear to my mind that we can obtain some valuable information from Sir Jasper. He knoweth that which he is unwilling to tell. He knoweth both branches of our family. Someway I feel that the little port of Dantima holds the key of our destiny. I do not believe that the letters were burned, thy judgment to the contrary notwithstanding."

"Thy fears are groundless. The half-witted lad and the Custom House clerk so stated. I have little reason to doubt their statement, since they would have small cause to misrepresent the truth."

"Right glad am I that thou thinketh thus, but I have

sore misgivings in this matter. Ever since Sir Jasper betook himself to Dantima, and returned with that bright letter on his breast, there lurketh the scent of danger. His reticence is marvelous."

"A woman's intuition is oft superior to man's soundest judgment. Bethink thee 'twas in the service of King Charles that he went? Some affairs of State that sent him thither? Thou wouldst not wish to know that which would condemn thee to the Tower."

"The nobleman will be here to-morrow. I would sound him well for the telling that is the loom of our destiny."

"It will do little harm, since he refused to impart to the King the details of the adventure, and preferred banishment to royal favor. It seemeth to me that thy best endeavors will end in failure."

Her face flushed with excitement, as she hissed: "Then will I send this titled fool to the Tower."

"Be not over-rash, Your Grace; try thou gentler ways of securing his confidence. And the King should refuse thy demands, what then would be thy course of proceedings?"

"I will acquaint His Majesty with the suspicions that haunt my soul. The secret must be forced from his lips, or off goes his head."

"Softly! In this thou art grossly mistaken. The King dare not behead this cavalier; it would strengthen the cause of these roundheads. It looketh more to me that His Majesty's own head sitteth not securely on his shoulders. Again, how would the knowledge benefit thy cause? Be not rash. Fill thou him with wine, the betrayer of all confidences, and his glib tongue will give thee the desire of thy heart."

"I can well be sworn, thou art right. Hast thou thought of the evil tongues that revel in such slander?"

"Your Grace, slander gained thee thy case in court. Slander might be the goodly means of keeping what thou hast."

This superb woman, with a scheming heart, winced at the counselor's remarks, yet answered she nothing, but sat thus for full ten minutes, her jeweled hand toying with the crimson velvet fringe that bordered the table cover. The indigo blue of her eyes took on a peculiar hue from the reflection of the fire-light. Her black hair had a deeper tinge. Her thoughts were over-busy with the silence of the apartment. A hundred times she turned the costly ring that was an heirloom in the family, as she wistfully studied the future in the glowing depths of the fire.

The following afternoon this haughty dame made her toilet with all of the art that fashion demanded. All of the coquetry of her nature was aroused, for the game to be played was no ordinary one. A score of times she turned to the great mirror that ornamented the marble mantel with its bronzed statuettes. She gave a little pat of impatience with her jeweled-slippered feet at the tardiness of her expected guest. The thought of his failure to appear at the hour that had been agreed upon made her nervous. This feeling passed quickly. The nobleman's name was announced.

"Thrice welcome, thou cavalier monk; pray be seated. I will give to the servitors orders that no one be admitted to the mansion to mar the enjoyment of this day."

"Thanks, Your Grace; with me, woman's eyes are love's elixir to banish worrying care." He gave a bold look of admiration at this superb creature, whose violet

eyes were veiled by lashes of unusual length. Her head rested on one jeweled hand; this position displayed the shapely arm that was supported by the table that was between them.

"Ah! thou charming nobleman, since thy religious retreat in Dantima thy tongue hath not forgotten its soft notes of flattery; the absence hath softened the ruggedness of thy face's skin and added to the measure of His Majesty's wine flagons, to the betterment of his revenues."

"Thou wouldst tempt me to the undoing of my vow? Then what meanest these liquors that have a thousand ruby eyes, yet none so bright as thine?"

She laughed softly, and clapped her plump hands in a childish manner that was charming, as she replied: "I wonder not that the Queen doth keep thee at her side when thou sayest such gallant speeches. Dost thou reserve thy bon mots for the royal family?"

"How much do I owe to the graciousness of Her Majesty's kindness, else this head were lying by the side of the block and ax. None can be more generous with gratefulness than he who stands before thee."

"Forgive the remission, Sir Jasper; sit thou close by my side, thou turnest my poor head with thy compliments. In good sooth I am thy warmest friend, and yet thou knowest it not. Thy face haunts me; there is a deep-seated sorrow that thy keen wit hideth yet not entirely. A smile of sadness sweeps over thy visage betimes that revealeth its sad story. Tell me of thy life, and thou findest not in all England so swift a listener; let me share thy burden, as I have none of my own."

"Then be it far from me to mar the happiness of thy existence with sorrows that were not worth the mention-

ing; every spring hath its tears, else had not summer the flowers."

"How shall I entertain thee, then, thou ingrate? No visitors shall mar the joyousness of these hours that wine shall make more brilliant."

"Give me but the glances of thine eyes, that would charm a saint from Heaven."

"It seemeth they charm thee not, thou hard of heart."

"Bethink thee I am no angel, Your Grace."

"It rather inclines me to men than angels." She sighed as she said this, and continued: "Men are in the body, but angels are in the spirit only."

"There is a constraint with thee that this wine will melt like the dew of morning. Thy priestly vows bind thee no more, since thou art in the service of the sovereign. Tell me of Dantima, and of thy life whilst thou wert there; 'twill be more marvelous than dreams of Arabia. Tell me how camest thou by that sorcerer's letter that hath an unearthly glow even beneath thy cowl. Tell me why thou becamest a monk. Right well I know thy heart ached to forego the pleasures of King Charles' court."

"'Twas a fool's errand and a fool's reward that made the wager at Mother Shiply's Inn a curse to mark me thus. For such reason took I the holy orders, and thereby lost the friendship of England's King, and was banished for a duty bravely done. Such is the temperament of these uncertain times."

She drew yet nearer to the cavalier monk, and in an eager whisper said: "Go on with thy adventure; seest thou not that my ears are strained to catch the faintest sound of thy voice?"

"'Twas state despatches that His Majesty gave into my

keeping. I delivered these to the proper officer; naught else can I tell thee."

She filled a glass with wine and held it to his lips, and then drew back while a flash of anger passed over her face, as she whimpered: "Thinkest thou that the wine is drugged to thy undoing? See, I drink to the health of thy hermitless cell, whose walls are forsaken by thee."

He answered not a word when this toast was so beautifully delivered. He feared this scheming woman more than the wine, because she had the private ear of King Charles. Well he knew the anxious hopes that filled her false and fickle soul. Florette was not forgotten.

"How, now, thou obdurate one; is it thus I invite thee to Ashton Park that thou mayst insult me? Thou hast forgotten my station in life."

"I meant thee no offence, thou queenly one. How the Church's vows come like a ghost to haunt me. I am yet in orders, though in His Majesty's service. I am sorely tempted; have thou mercy on me."

"One glass and I acquit thee of the offense."

The glasses were filled to the brim. The King's messenger and the duchess arose to quaff the wine, yet neither tasted the nectar. A solemn stillness hushed the air; awe-stricken they stared in wonder as the full, rich notes of a miserere filled every nook of the apartment.

The far-away weird sound made the music enchanting. Near and nearer sounded the solemn notes that Sir Jasper had heard a hundred times; 'twas the brotherhood in the monastery at Dantima admonishing him of his danger, the danger of a tempted brother, whose vows might not be so lightly broken.

With a groan that touched the duchess' heart, he fell upon his knees and elevated his crucifix on high. In a

sweet, though sad, voice he replied. With a grand swell of harmony the chanting died away. The mysterious arms were around his neck; the same voice exclaimed: "Come to me, thou art mine." How these words thrilled him with a supernatural power. Then the strings of a lute were swept by a practiced hand, and a musical voice sang:

Come to me quickly, and banish the gloom,
That sweeps o'er my soul like a deadly simoon,
Sweeps over my heart and its hot desert air,
To leave only shadows and poisoned despair.

"Drink, Sir Jasper, shadows shall never frighten my soul." Again they raised their glasses; the wine was thrown upon the fire, where it sputtered and blazed with a blue flame, while the glasses were dashed to pieces on the stone hearth.

"Am I mad, Your Grace? Hath reason deserted her throne?" He said this while he wiped the dews of cold perspiration from his forehead. "Didst thou hear and heed the strange happening?"

She sat cowering in the armchair that was nearest to her as she whispered hoarsely: "Right well I heard the solemn warning for thee." Then she glided towards him as if to claim his protection. Again the phantom arms were around his neck, and the voice said: "Move thou on, move thou on."

He arose from the seat and walked to the door. He did not even glance around to see if the duchess was conscious of his movements. She glided like some beautiful leopard to the entrance, to prevent the escape of her prey. She moaned: "Thou shalt not leave me thus, until thou hast explained to me the mystery that passeth all wonder. I have the right to know; like the warning finger on the

wall, it presages the downfall of my house. Thou canst save me by the telling of thy adventure."

"I can tell thee naught; ask thou the King."

"Thinkest thou that the rosary thou wearest has not been in my hands a good score of times? Now canst thou say that thou hast not met these enemies that would destroy me and mine? If thou deny me this request, I will to His Majesty at once and tell him thou hast proved a miscreant to thy trust and to thy sovereign."

"Then thou art a fiend to mar the happiness of a life. I had no commission save the bearer of despatches to the Custom House officer, and this I did fulfill and with dispatch."

"If thou telleth me not, to the Tower thou goest. Well thou knowest what this means. I am a desperate woman; see, the door is locked."

Some impression came to him as he moved slowly to the entrance. The portal swung backwards on its hinges and the nobleman passed out into the darkness and returned to London.

When he was gone the duchess sat like one in a dream. One cold shiver after another passed through her well-shaped limbs. She sank on an ottoman near to the brass fenders where the heat was fiercest. "I cannot fight the dead," she plaintively moaned, "for the spirits wander back to life to cheat me of my prey. I will go to the King on the morrow and acquaint him of this wonder. I will tell him of the rosary and paint the picture to this messenger's undoing. The King dare not refuse me the request. The Tower shall bring the secret from his lips, or silence them forever."

In the early hours of the morning she hastened to Lon-

don and drove at once to the palace, where she had a private audience with His Majesty.

"What brings thee to London at this early hour? It must be that which needeth prompt attention, or I mistake thee over-much."

"Sir Jasper hath deceived thee. Right well he knoweth of that which thou wisheth most to have tidings, and from Dantima, that bringeth trouble to thy reign."

"Now by St. George will I summons him at once and learn the truth of what thou speaketh so fairly unto our royal ear. I would have thee present that thou mayest accuse this knight of the silent tongue of that thou tellest with such a mystical grace."

When the nobleman came unto the King he uncovered his head and made a cold bow to the duchess. He waited in silence for the tempest that was yet to break on his unhappy life.

"Sir Jasper, can it be possible that so loyal a heart as thine beats but to deceive thy sovereign, or that thou hast proved recreant to our royal will when high commissions, or policies of state, need men whose very souls should be mirrors of bright honor? Alas! that thou should withhold the truth to screen from justice outlaws that defy my power."

"Your Majesty, such is not the truth. I fulfilled thy Gracious Majesty's instructions to the letter. What happened outside of this was of my choosing, and I am repaid for the foolish wager that concerneth neither thee nor thy kingdom."

"Well and truly spoken, Sir Jasper. As a proof of my graciousness, I command thee to relate how thou camest by that strange marking. I have staked my life upon the trueness of thy loyal heart. This is the touchstone that

will refine a purer gold, or it will mark the taintings that belong alone to traitors. Now, what sayest thou?"

"Again I tell thee, my King, that I have naught to say in this matter."

His Majesty summoned an officer of the palace guard and said something in a low voice. Bowing low the officer retired. The group that stood in the throne room were silent. This silence was disturbed by the tramp of armed men that filed in and surrounded the King's messenger.

"Off to the Tower with him, that he may have time to reflect. With gloomy silence let him commune. I want no such close-tongued subjects, that smile and dumbly say me nay. If thou preferest a dungeon to a palace, why, in good sooth, the choice is thine."

With a low bow, the King's messenger saluted until he reached the exit, where Sir Aubrey intercepted him. The instructions to the guard were strict; for this reason the prisoner's friend was not permitted to hold converse with him, and thus Sir Jasper found the solid walls more companionable than His Majesty's hot temper.

"This is life," the prisoner soliloquized. "How many buffets hath misfortune for me." Then the thought came to him that the mysterious power was ever with him. Yet he used not the gift to his releasing, for well he knew that the King would be more curious as to the means employed.

Sir Aubrey hastened to acquaint the Queen with the misfortune that befell his friend. Her intercession again saved this nobleman from death.

CHAPTER XI.

DANGER AT THE COTTAGE—THE TROOPERS TAKE POSSESSION.

THERE was an anxious group that gathered around the fire at the cottage. Nattie had seen a red light far out to sea. To strengthen this conviction the war vessels in the bay were moving seaward, with their guns shotted and manned. The nervous tension of the widow and her children was at its maximum, while the boy arranged the signal for danger and swept the horizon with the old ship's glass.

"It is father's vessel, a swift-winged ocean courser," Nattie exclaimed. "He sees the danger and has changed his tack and is sailing northward." The booming of the King's cannons shook the house on the Devil's Elbow.

"Oh, my son, did any of the shots strike the ship? I wish this was the end of the trouble; I am so tired of this risk and danger. I will vow ten candles to our lady and gold to feed the poor if he escapes; if he is captured the King will behead him and thou wilt be fatherless."

"Tush! mamma, the two war vessels are no match for papa's beautiful ship; the King's cruisers are crowding sail to get within shorter range, and our sloop still gains in space, and leads them a merry chase. Fear not; when darkness is upon us, he whom we love so dearly will shelter in the cavern." Boom! "There goes father's stern chaser, and the gun was well aimed, for the shot has disabled one of the pursuers. They are clearing away the splintered mainmast; the other is gaining, or papa is preparing to give battle."

"No! no! my son, tell me not so. I cannot bear this

suspense. How does he now? 'Twould be madness to think of such a venture."

"He has put the ship about and sails eastward. I see the red gleam on her starboard beam; night is closing in upon them. The lights on the enemies' decks grow brighter. I can see nothing but the signals." Nattie arranged the curtains and resumed his watch. "All the lights are out on our vessel, while the English men-of-war are cruising far out to sea. I can just make out their lanterns; they are hull down abreast of the water."

A faint, low whistle came from beneath their feet. Nattie hastened out to the seemingly harmless well. With all his strength he turned the handle of the windlass a dozen of times, and rushed into the cottage to be clasped in his father's arms.

"Well, Nattie, my boy, hast thou stood by thy guns, as I told thee? I am sure that thou hast, for the safety of these dear ones tell me as much."

"Yes, sir. I have done my best." The boy's mother interrupted him with:."My husband, he has done more than his best. Oh, how manly he has been; how vigilant; and much information he has gained that will help our cause."

"Didst thou find the bundle of letters in yon antiquated Custom House?"

"No, sir; I found the sailor's kit, the package of letters was not with the other effects. I have the date that the seaman came hither, and have located the grave in yon old churchyard. I discovered beneath the chapel vault the register of births and marriages and deaths. The marriage was a legal one. I have little else to relate."

Again he embraced his son, and replied: "In good sooth hast thou done well in this matter. Had the bundle of letters been found our troubles would have ended, and

we would have sailed from this port with happy hearts. Thou must e'en try thy luck once more."

"It may not be so, my father. I heard the fat collector of the King say that a troop of soldiers was on the highway bound for Dantima. They come to surround and destroy us. They have orders to set fire to the cottage. I will take Dareall and scour the forest. They cannot be so far away, because for two days they have been on the march. Thou seest that the apartments are bare of furnishings, and we awaited thy coming with some anxiety."

Having said this, Nattie and his dog climbed down the steepest part of the hill and circled the grotto, where the dog placed his nose to the ground and set off at a gentle lope that soon left the boy behind. "The danger is nearer than I suspected, for Dareall hath the keen scent of a bloodhound. Some spy came hither to the spring and returned with water to where they now are. My good dog will come back to me within the minute."

It was well that little Nattie was familiar with the paths and byways of this great woods, with its rank vegetation, for the test of his woodcraft was invaluable in this emergency. The sagacious brute doubled on his tracks, came up behind the boy and rubbed his cold nose on the outstretched hand that always had a pat of encouragement for the dog.

"Hast thou found these ungodly knaves, thou prince of good fellows? Then lead on slowly and I will follow thee."

This noble animal moved rapidy for a league and then gave Nattie the signal of danger by settling flat on the ground, while he sniffed the air with his black nose.

The young scout moved cautiously forward, yet he could see no sign of the troopers. He followed the dog until they came to a washout, where he saw the glimmer

of lights on the underbrush. The soldiers were concealed in a deep depression that ran east and west. He crept forward until he was in earshot, where he parted the tall weeds and glanced sharply down on five score of His Majesty's picked soldiers; by the fire-light he counted five score of mounted men, besides the officers. The rashers of bacon smelled enticingly as they stewed over the coals, while the bright accoutrements of the intruders reflected the yellow rays of the firelight. The rum in their flasks swept away their vigilance as well as their caution, for they had no sentries posted to warn them of danger.

The captain of this troop was ill-tempered and spoke sharply to the soldiers, who paid little heed to his grumbling. "Wist ye not that His Majesty gave thee strict orders that no fires should be made, and here twenty flames do send their shafts of light upwards, to betray thy presence."

"Wist ye not," a stout trooper replied, "that the King gave orders to advance to battle without waiting for daylight, and devil a one wishes to take the old rookery when the devil's dance house at such unseemly hours sends forth its groans and ungodly lights; not a man of ye is brave enough to meet full-handed these horrors."

"To-morrow by sun-up be thou booted and in the saddle. Hold! 'twere better to leave the horses here in this ravine where they will be secure from detection."

With their saddles for pillows they soon broke the stillness of night by their loud snoring, that hard riding made more deep.

Nattie crawled to a safe distance from the camp and walked briskly to the cottage, where he found the dear

ones eagerly awaiting his return. "What hast thou to tell us of thy adventure, my son?"

"Five score of troopers sleep in the hollow near to the spot where thou wouldst meet the agent from London. Stout troopers are they all; most of them are men picked from His Majesty's squadrons. By sun-up they move upon us, led by one of Dantima's burghers, who knoweth the way right well."

"Make thou no fires, for I would deceive them. Let cold ashes and colder hearths await them. Let us make use of the time that yet belongeth unto us." The captain of the unnamed cruiser went down into the cavern and returned with his sailors, who transferred all of the household movables to the ship, while these anxious hearts prepared to follow in the wake of these furnishings.

"Nattie, I must deliver these despatches in London, since the agent whom I expected to see will not be able to meet me at the appointed place, I must intrust the papers to thee. Remain thou in Dantima; as thou art not of sound mind, thy coming and going will not be marked. I will return for thee when the moon darkeneth in the coming month."

"My father, hast thou forgotten the collar that encircleth the dog's neck. It was made for such a purpose, and I go not to London."

"Thy wit is beyond thy years. The dog will go straight to the master that owned him, and the despatches will be safely delivered if thou canst make him understand the duty required."

Tears gathered in Nattie's eyes as he sobbed: "I will not see the dog again. A thousand times he hath befriended thee and thine, and thus he is rewarded for his faithfulness."

"Then must I return these documents and report a failure of a duty that I have staked my life upon. These are the most important of my secret bearings. I know not what seemeth best for me and mine."

"My father, I will e'en send Dareall on this mission, if thou wilt await the faithful creature's return. Let the King's soldiers take the house, we will be safely concealed beneath in the cavern; I wager a good crown that they burn not the cottage, and should they do so, they will not find our place of retreat; the dog is fleet of foot, and will return ere thou hast missed him; give me the despatches and I will go hence into the forest and await Dareall's returning."

Nattie removed the dog's collar, and unscrewed the middle band that was double; it was made for the purpose of deceiving; the documents were of the lightest parchment, and were snugly fitted into the receptacle, the band was replaced, the boy kissed each one good-bye and glided into the darkness of the forest. He threw his arms around the dog's neck, lowered his nozzle to the ground where the feet of the agent had trodden, and said in a low tone of voice: "Be off with ye, my faithful friend," and returned to the cottage to wait the breaking of dawn.

The sun was full three hours in the sky ere the watchers on the cliff heeded the advance of these soldiers of King Charles. Nattie flanked them; from his place of concealment he watched them strive up the rugged steep, their heavy leathern boots and accoutrements made the ascent difficult. When they reached the top of the hill they thirsted for water, but the well was dry; the lad had detached the rope that opened the great doors to the cavern, he heard the curses of disappointment as these marauders

moved through the empty cottage; then he crept down to where the dog would find him, and knew not the fate of the dear ones hidden in the ship.

When the boy had gone to the woods, mother and daughter pressed closely to the captain's side, while he touched a secret spring that caused the heavy mantel with its fireplace to swing noiselessly back on its hinges; they descended by a circular flight of steps into the bowels of the earth, and descended not a moment too soon, because the tramp of heavy footsteps sounded above them.

"His Majesty is over-frightened," the officer said with an oath, "naught see I to shake the nervous bones with a senseless quaking that betokeneth so much fear; I wot not why the King should burn so goodly a pile; should he graciously make me a warrant for the title I could with Betina live here at my ease and give good promise to His Majesty that no plottings mar the peacefulness of his reign."

Again and again these hardy troopers sounded the walls, rapped with their sword hilts upon the panels and floors that gave no hollow sound. Right heartily they jeered at the spy from Dantima, who became wroth at their hilarity and whined: "I wager thee a month's pay of thy allowance that thou canst hold thy own with the imps of darkness not a single hour. Tarry thou till the clock in Dantima's tower ringeth out the hour of twelve, and if daylight findeth thee with whole bones, then is this purse of sovereigns thine."

"Good citizen, thy gold be mine. Thinkest thou a hundred of the King's tried troopers fear what thy timid brain creates by the fearing. Go to, thou makest thy com-

plaint to London for naught; a flimsy tale bear I to my superior officer, and be laughed at for the venture."

"And thou burnest it not for the good of Dantima, thou trooper of the King; then thou fulfillest not the orders of thy King."

"No such orders had I."

"Stay thou then; I will see what is left of thee betimes on the morrow. Be it as thou wisheth, thou fool, and I depart."

"Thou goest not a foot, else find I not thee for the winning. In yon old town thy visages are as like as farthing pieces, and I could not pick thee from the town's gathering, and thou wagereth my life. Stay thou here the night, or it goeth rough with thee; thou flieth and this straight blade empaleth thee."

Quaking with fear this persecutor of the innocent sat him down in the farthest corner and waited for the peals that would mark the hour of twelve. He looked timidly around upon the sleeping soldiers and counted the beatings of his heart above the snoring. A cold shiver ran through his body as the twelfth hour broke the stillness of midnight.

A rumbling noise awoke every sleeping soldier; a strange sound as of the hissing of a thousand serpents rang in the ears of those whose hearts were filled with terror. A strange light that had not earthly hues made the night as the brightness of day. Each soldier felt the unseen strokes of as many lashes as there were men. They howled in pain; for each stroke was as the burn from a red-hot iron. In vain they tried to escape; their bodies were thrown back into the rooms until the air resounded with their cries of terror. Then a frigid wind picked them up one by one and cast them down the hill,

where they lay like so many dead men till morning brake upon them.

When their senses returned they looked not backwards, but limped into the place where their animals were staked, gathered up the basketfuls that had been prepared for them by these ghostly hands. These baskets, be it said, contained the broken bits that had once been their swords, including their military trappings. Sorely they mounted their steeds and rode sullenly away.

"By my faith, I have not laid eyes upon the weazen-faced roundhead that lead us hither to our undoing. Hath any one seen the coward?"

"Captain, he lieth at the foot of yon damnable hill as stiff as the steel in my halbert. His neck hath a twist that maketh the head bob about like a cork on a fishing line."

"Forward! trot! march!" and the cavalcade rideth straight to London, and never halted till the column reached barrack, where they related the strange adventure which cometh straightway to the ears of the King, for which reason they were ordered to report to His Majesty forthwith.

The troops were drawn up in line within the palace enclosure. The courtyard presented a strange spectacle. The rich costumes of the nobles of the realm mingled with the blouses of the middle classes; all gazed in wonder at the soldiers whose patches and sore bruises disfigured them. His Majesty gazed and gazed and said naught. He was bewildered at the strange sight, and laughed a loud laugh that had a tinge of anger in it, as he broke forth with:

"By Saint George and merry England this surpasseth mortal understanding. 'Tis not a pleasing prospect to

see my brave troopers in such a plight. These be picked men from my squadrons. Tell me, brave soldiers, why thou art disarmed?"

The baskets were arranged in a row before the King, who laughed even louder than he laughed previously, for the glittering pieces of steel sparkled like the frost of a winter morning.

"England may well be proud of such loyal men with iron nerves. Braver hearts never beat beneath a soldier's jacket. 'Twas these that made such worthy cause against the powers of darkness that defy my royal will. Return to thy commands. Each stout trooper shall have his parchment for a commission."

Having delivered himself of this speech the King turned on his heel and ascended the marble stairway that led to the Queen's apartments. There was a serious thought tugging at his heart. The troopers rode back to barrack and dispersed to their company quarters well pleased with the promise of preferment on the list of honor.

"My Royal Consort," the King fumed, "what do such things portend? the downfall of our house? My best and bravest men scattered like flimsy chaff before a gale of wind, yet I sent brave Sir Jasper to storm the hill alone. Strange to relate his sword was untouched, if he failed. The honors of war were extended to him, and the hundred were disarmed."

"Forgetest thou, my liege lord, that Sir Jasper hath the baleful letter on his breast. These, thy soldiers, were not so honored."

"A very doubtful honor, since the adventure sealed his lips. My trust in him wavereth not. I do sorely repent me of the ill-advised rashness that sent him to the Tower,

and thus banished from my presence his loyal devotion and deprived me of his sound reasoning that made his counsel of good effect. Since he keepeth such a close tongue within his mouth for his own reasons, I can trust him with a secret mission that requireth tact and bravery."

CHAPTER XII.

CARL ENLISTS IN THE KING'S SERVICE.

THE strain upon the nerves of Carl was too much for his youthful years. For three weeks the alchemist stood by the side of his son's couch to give the mixtures that his skillful hand compounded; the fires on his forge died down; his dreams of transmutation were unfulfilled, for Carl was sick unto death. When health crept back along Carl's veins the old man returned to his crucibles and the boy returned to his rod and fishing line.

The walls of Dantima oppressed him. For this reason he took the road to London just as he had taken it a double scores of times. The pool where the finest fish were caught invited repose with its shaded coolness and quietness. Shall I tell thee that this boy had no thought of himself; the fish were for his little playmate. Again and again he threw back into the water those that came not up to his standard of excellence.

With his knife he cleaned them nicely and bethought himself how acceptable the present would be to those on the cliff. He did not know that the cottage was empty, because when he last was with them they expected to hide in the ruined chapel on the hill until the darkness of the moon made escape possible.

"I have neglected Florette, and she knew not of my illness, else had she braved the ill-will of Dantima to get a note to me. It is best. The times are sadly out of joint. One neighbor watcheth another and speaketh ill behind his back; another neighbor accuseth another of witchcraft. The roundheads gather in force; all eyes

are on Cromwell who hedgeth the throne with difficulties. Now these covenanters sing their Psalms in streets. I know not the turning of it all."

While he was thus soliloquizing he was busy with his fish. After the cleaning he wrapped the pieces in a clean linen cloth and made his way through the underbrush to the grotto, where he rested and awaited the coming of some one from the cliff. His strength was not equal to the effort. He thought this as he kept his range of vision on the steep incline. He whistled, thinking that Florette would hear the sound and come down to the spring.

He waited and listened. No echoing voice came back to him. It was the hour of their tryst. The ray of sunlight moved along the arms of the cross, until it was reflected from the pool, and she came not.

"They are timid. The fear of venturing abroad keepeth them close within doors. I must to them ere weakness overcometh me."

He left his basket at the foot of the hill and laboriously made his way up the pathway and stood panting for breath at the gate. A fear seized him. The neat housewifery that was wont to add a charm to the welcome was conspicuously absent. He entered the house without so much as knocking. The desolation overpowered him. He gave a great outcry of pain, and would have fallen, but he steadied his body by holding on to the door frame. With firmer resolution he descended the steep hill and sought under the moss-covered rock for a letter.

"This hath been here some days. The parchment is moist, and yet the spot is dry." He unrolled the missive and read:

"My Dear Carl:—Thou canst see by the teardrops on these pages that I thought of thee. These stains are the

sad regrets of my life. They are all for thee, my childhood companion. Thou canst ask for no more touching tribute, because they flowed from an aching heart. I will always think of thee with feelings of deepest affection. The memory of thee will live in my thoughts so long as life shall last.

"The King's soldiers surrounded us; we were obliged to fly for our lives. I cannot tell thee where a letter will reach us. We are adrift on the sea of uncertainty, and we know not where our abiding place may be. Should we quit our ship and land, I will send thee tidings that thou mayest communicate with us. When this missive is in thy hands I will be far from thee on the wide sea. A hundred tender good-byes from mother and myself to thee and thine.

"Tell Father Leonard our gratitude is not measured by time or space. God will bless him for the good deeds done in the past. Should we never meet again, I will say to thee a long farewell. Florette."

The nervous temperament of Carl was prostrated. He read the writing six times. The studied elegance of the diction smote him like the blow of a two-edged sword, and thus killed every hope. Like unto a senseless lump of humanity he sank at the foot of the cross. He arose and dashed the cool spring water upon himself until he was chilled. Thus he put out the fires that hurt his brain, and staggered homewards by the nearest pathway.

His white face startled the gatekeeper, who spake kindly, and said: "Carl, thou art ill, my son. Thus the cliff maiden hath repaid thee for thy kindness with a broken heart."

"Say thou not so; the fault was mine, and the punishment was mine. Oft hath she told me as much; yet I

hoped that time would make the change for my preferment. I staked the game and lost."

"Carl, my liking extendeth to thee, else had I reported thee to the Council, when I knew right well whither thy footsteps led. Thou must laugh if thy heart be breaking. Let not Dantima know of thy misfortune. Their jeers will be more torturing than the torments of the pillory."

"I thank thee, neighbor; thy words are words of exceeding wisdom and I will bide thy reckoning thereof, and the more disappoint them." He passed on to his low-browed doorway and entered. There he beheld one of his aunts from the London town, who straightway embraced him and greeted him with: "Thou hast grown to fair proportions, and yet I would have thee a full finger's length taller; otherwise thou hast a strong, well-knit frame."

"In good sooth thou art welcome, grandam; hath mother told thee all, and thou knowest that they of the cliff are gone."

"Right well is Dantima rid of them. Ever since they came without arriving, the old town hath had her measure full or misfortune."

"Gently, grandam, speak not unkindly of the absent. Since the time of my coming into the world the same mysterious agency has haunted the Devil's Elbow. Mark ye, what it behooveth me to say; had Dantima kept within her own bounds and industriously occupied her hands to thrift and not molested the good spirits that ever owned the hill, ne'er had misfortune visited her. Did not the ruling governor make a sale to these inhabitants of the cliff? Hath not the deed been duly recorded, and

the money paid into the treasury? Then, how can Dantima make war on defenseless women?"

"Thou sayest the truth, Carl. Even before my great grandfather's day these haunted yon rising that faceth the sea, that seamen may be safely guided into the bay and none the worse for the storms."

"Then how sayeth thou that Dantima rejoiceth, when the evil still remains. I will place the sleepy old town in the pillory, and blush for the injustice that condemneth the innocent, whose hearts art as pure as the prayers of a saint. In truth Dantima knew little of those that dwelt on yon heights, and those that sojourned thereon knew little of the mysterious power that guarded them, and cared less for any danger."

The grandam drew nearer to Carl and whispered: "Thou sayest excellently well. The fault lieth with these roundheads that have not enough of religion, and too little of mercy; too many canting Psalms, and not enough of loyalty to good King Charles."

"Thou art in evidence in this matter. These be perilous times, grandam; would that I were in London. The burgh is distasteful to me since those of the cliff departed."

"Carl, wouldst like to be a soldier? My brother commands a squadron of the King's troopers. Say thou the word and thou mayest be a captain, for the reason of thy learning. His Majesty hath sore need of such, and would welcome thee kindly. What sayest thou, my nephew?"

"I say aye with a willing heart. Hast thou thought of mother and my father. He is as helpless as a child unweaned from its mother. Who would care for them? and I in the King's service."

"The pay that will come to thee is goodly enough for

thee and thine. Thou canst not do better here, where idleness rules the hour. Bethink thee of the advancement in His Majesty's favor. Thy uncle was a subaltern, and in the year he rideth at the head of the column."

"Let it be as thou sayest. It is beyond the limit of my endurance to stand the senseless jests of these rude covenanters, that have little mercy in their souls and less judgment in their reasoning."

"Thou shalt be a grand officer, and the wages will make thee rich."

"Thou wilt write at once. Thou hast my heart's fullest gratitude. I am impatient to be away; something, anything to make me forget the present."

"In a fortnight or mayhap less, I will acquaint thee of the contents. Now go, thy mother awaiteth thee with some anxiety."

"What hath happened to thee, Carl, thy face is drawn and suffering, and I fear me thou wilt have a relapse. Hast thou bad news from the cliff?"

Without replying, he handed the missive that Florette placed under the rock into his mother's hands, and said: "Read thou it; all these dear people were sorely pressed and escaped the vigilance of the cruisers and the troopers with a skill that dumbfoundeth me. They have been gone these many days."

"Be thou not cast down, my son. Thy love is all mine. A division that parteth thee from me would break my heart.

"When I betake me from this world then thou canst find another mother that I hope will be as loyal to thee as I have been. Until then, tush! tush! thou art not yet out of thy teens, and speakest thou of marrying?"

"I have enlisted in the King's service. Thou and my

father shall move to London, where the comforts of life shall be thine. My pay as an officer will be ample for this purpose."

"Be it as thou wisheth, my son; far be it from me to counsel to thy disadvantage. If thy heart be set upon it, why have it thy way. When will thy commission come to thee? Thy father's crucibles and his parchments are to follow, else thou gettest not his consent."

"Wherefore should I say him nay? if it is the happiness of his living, I have naught but his welfare to consider. Keep thou a close tongue within thy head until all is ready. Sufficient conveyance will arrive from London for the removal of thy effects."

"Who doeth all this for thee? 'Tis thy aunt, I will be sworn. These many days hath she the desire to have us in London. 'Tis safer in the metropolis, where the malcontents can ne'er burn or put to the sword those who disagree in the churching."

Dantima was startled when the vehicles came to carry away the family. The loss of a single person was a misfortune because the ratio of increase or decrease would thus be disarranged. The recounting of noses and polls would become a necessity. The balances of Father Time would be readjusted to Dantima's ordering.

Little heeded the family these mutterings. They departed as quietly as they came. Carl's commission as an officer in His Majesty's royal horse came the day before he quitted Dantima. The gaudy uniform set off his clean-cut figure to a nicety; the new bright sword that swung from the belt, together with the excitement of his leave-taking softened the bitter pangs of disappointed love. The stirring life of a soldier would make a man of a youth. Thus the alchemist and his family said good-bye to Dantima.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KING'S MESSENGER SAILS FOR ROME ON A SECRET MISSION.

SIR JASPER was yet in the Tower, brooding over the ingratitude of King Charles, in whose service the misfortune of his life came to him. With naught but gloomy walls to look upon, he grew more despondent each day, and waited for the pleasure of His Majesty.

The day following the consultation between His Majesty and the Queen, an order for the release of the King's messenger was placed in the hands of Sir Aubrey, who for a second time became a mediator between royalty and the cavalier monk. With a right good grace he hastened to the Tower, where the dejection of his friend mellowed the joy that hastened his footsteps.

"Cheer thee, thou football of fortune. I bear thee peaceful messages from King Charles, and I mistake not he sendeth thee on a mission forthwith. By God's mercy, I would not say nay to thy going. The King grows more peevish each day, and Parliament hath much to answer for in the making thereof. Let us to my rooms in the palace that thou mayest be rid of the musty smell that hangeth on thy skirts with a dampness that recalleth Dantima."

"Aubrey, had the King thy stability, England were not a hotbed for the reformations that are firebrands for the burning. The lines are sharply drawn, and I mistake not strife will whet the sword of battle to England's undoing. Here should I be to brunt the tide of battle, not in the Far East. That promise of advancement hath curbed the

wishes of my high desire, such I will not say. To the King at once."

"Not until thou promiseth me to depart, for thy head sits lightly on thy strong shoulders, and thou knowest the proverb that, 'A live dog were better than a dead lion.'"

"Be it so; thy friendship hath stood the test of adversity with a wondrous power of endurance. I have tried thy patience sorely."

When they had come to the King in especial audience, and stood before the ruler of half of the world, both courtiers made their obesiance and waited for royalty to speak. "I have pardoned thee; the intercession of my royal consort hath tempered my hot displeasure. Since thy tongue keepeth so well thine own secrets, by Saint George and the fiery dragon, I know that thou wilt keep the secrets that I will entrust to thee, even at the peril of thy life."

With a wave of his hand he cleared the chamber of all save the cavalier monk, and continued: "These state papers that I entrust thee with are to be delivered into the hands of the head of the Church at Rome. Thou wilt meet spies at every turn of thy elbow. Heed them not, and give up thy life ere the documents go from thee."

"And thou doest this well thy reward shall be commensurate with the danger. Peace be between me and thee; farewell."

Sir Aubrey waited at the foot of the grand stairway that leadeth up to the main avenue of the palace grounds. When the King's messenger came to the lower terrace he halted and waited for his comrade to join him. Arm in arm they moved off in the direction of Parliament street and dined together at the sign of the lion. With a silent movement of the index finger to the lips, the bearer of despatches cautioned his companion in arms

to be discreet. When the meal was eaten these friends went straightway to their chambers; yet asked not Sir Aubrey a question about the trust, whose delivery was beset with so many dangers.

"Aubrey, hath thou naught to say ere I go hence? Bethink thee, that I may ne'er return, and should I fall, 'twill be in the King's service. Forget thou not this to His Majesty's reminding."

"Right royally shall the promise be kept. 'Twere well that thou shouldst be shorn of thy locks, else trouble cometh to thee where thou least expecteth it. Keep thy cowl close about thee. With a stout heart do thou His Majesty's bidding, and have for thy motto, 'God and the Right.' "

The King's messenger informed himself of the hour when the staunch ship would sail. He wished not to go on board betimes, for the list of those who were to be his companions was large. Just as the great anchor was on the hoist he reached the deck and sought his cabin berth. The roughness of the sea was an excuse for not appearing at meals. This ordeal he dreaded, because the curious stares of his fellow passengers were reminders of danger.

He therefore cast his eyes, or rather his glances, downwards upon the pages of his prayer book. His straight, long sword was deposited in his room. The long curls (that were not worn outside of merry England) were tied back and hidden by the hood of his cowl. The fatal letter was securely confined by hookings of steel. A short, stout dagger was concealed beneath the peaceful gown of his order. Thus secured from detection, he paced the long deck, apparently lost in deep meditation,

yet his thoughts were far from the Church and her teachings.

The bracing air of the ocean expanded his soul until the universe was his. The seeming endlessness of the horizon belittled the intrigues of royalty that had no more foundation than mad ambition. Rome, the Eternal City, awakened new hopes and desires; not for the magnificence of its ancient glory, not for its historical ruins, but because Florette was there, and the hopes of his unchurching filled life with a thousand charms. Then the great arid desert, with its thirst and burning sands, tempered the dreams unto soberness.

Turn which way he would, he confronted the stares of those who sought the freedom of the deck. In wonderment, he asked himself the wherefore. He did not realize that the handsome face that was perfect in the moulding was in ill keeping with his saintly garb. The very air of sanctity that he assumed made him a double favorite with the fairer sex, who wondered, and wondered again at his reticence that evolved a greater share of sympathy in the feminine heart.

In vain he drew the friendly hood further over his face and seated himself at the far end of the bark, where he watched the wake of the ship as she plowed through the sea with every inch of canvas spread to the wind; yet was he observant of those around him. The state papers that he kept on his person made him doubly vigilant. A married couple particularly attracted his attention. The man had the appearance of an overfed Englishman, yet his corpulency did not seem natural; in other words, he played his part in a clumsy manner. The lady that was with this man, who was her hus-

band, was so affable to everyone that she was a general favorite with passengers and crew.

With all of her winsomeness, the young father was unapproachable. If she was in the cabin, he was on deck. Thus they played the game of cross-purposes for almost a week. As usual, he was gazing over the ship's side, looking down into the sea, when a voice at his side aroused his attention. The voice said:

"Father, thou art not going to encase thyself in a panoply of silence any longer. I will not permit thee to bury thyself another day. Life is too full of smiles and jests that thou shouldst go moping around when all around thee make companionship a boon well worth the cultivating."

"Bethink thee, my daughter, smiles are for the worldly; they who live in the present and think not of the future. A few brief years on one side, and endless eternity on the other side, such is life. By prayer and meditation we bury the present in the glory of a heavenly existence. Smiles are not the coins that buy eternity."

"Thankful art thou in thy heart that thou canst say as much. Thy face belongeth not to thy calling. I will well be sworn that it hath oft gotten thee into troubles of the heart that have sorrows, and 'tis this, and not thy over-zealous piety, that maketh thee so humble in thy demeanor."

"D'ost thou know the happenings that befell me, thou born of the world? How canst thou speak of that which belongeth to God's province? Go thy way, my daughter."

"Father, thou canst not deceive the quick eye of a woman; thy garb is as ill-fitting to thy cavalier heart as would be a priestly robe to thy King Charles." While

she said this she scrutinized closely his face. What she expected to see came not as a reality. The monk's features were as immovable as marble. He noted the shade of disappointment that she tried to conceal by a light laugh.

"Seek ye, my daughter, the Kingdom of Heaven and all things earthly will seem dross to thee; for the same reason will my reward be the greater when this mortality shall put on immortality. The man that is good because nature made him so is a yea-nay clod of existence, where temptation finds no ready soil to thrive upon."

"Then, father, how shalt thy reward be measured to thee?"

"God is the judge of all things, my daughter."

"I am a judge of human nature, my father; thy heart is a tempest of cross purposes; it is filled with longings that will not down at thy bidding. Thou hast not the calm and contented look on thy face that betokeneth the peace of a soul shining through the vistas of a holy beyond. Waves of hope and disappointment sweep like pictures over thy expressive face; e'en a child can see as much."

"Go, my daughter, leave me in peace; my meditations are the companions of my soul that profiteth much by the silence."

"Thou canst not deny me the churchly rite of confession; as a daughter of the Church, I demand it."

"Be it as thou sayest; come thou to the extreme after-deck of the vessel." She knelt at his feet and poured out her offendings to his patient ear. When the lady had finished, she waited for the absolution that never was uttered, because they were sailing up the Tiber, and the dome of St. Peter's loomed skyward in the distance.

"Why giveth thou me no absolution, my father?"

"Thou hast not confessed what is in thy heart. Tell me, my daughter, why comest thou to Rome and why leavest thou England?"

With a laugh that was contagious, she laid her plump, fair hand upon his arm and whispered: "Ne'er knew I good priests to carry swords and daggers; did I not see thy curls blown by the wind out from thy cowl?"

"Where dost thou stop in Rome, I may be of service to thee when thou least expecteth it. Be my guest, the Eternal City is worth an age of patient research."

"I stay not in Rome; my orders are for Arabia. I will break bread with some of the brothers that dwell in monasteries and depart hence on my mission."

A startled expression mounted to her face, which did not escape his keen eyes. This confirmed his suspicions and redoubled his vigilance. She cut short his suspicions by musing: "Arabia with its desolation is a poor exchange for the pleasures thou wilt enjoy in the home of the Imperial Cæsars. I have taken a deep interest in thee, thou cavalier monk." As she turned away, she coquettishly shook her finger at him and lisped: "Fear not, thou war monk with thy handsome face, we shall meet again."

When the vessel moored to the landing place, the King's messenger stood to one side of the gangway. He watched the passengers pass down the movable steps and disperse. He never lost sight of the beautiful woman whose carriage was in waiting. Some impatience angered her, for she stamped her foot on the pavement and looked around; a serving man approached, and in a deferential manner lifted the well-worn hat. She said something to him; as she was out of range, he could not hear what she said.

She beckoned with her finger for the priest to draw

nearer. When he came up to the vehicle her face softened somewhat as she added: "Father, we will take no excuse, enter; the way is long to the heart of Rome. Dangers beset thee; thou canst do thus much for thy soul's comfort."

"Do not disturb the meditations of a pilgrim that is blessed with the legs that God gave to him; I am content to put the world behind me."

"And put thyself behind the world, whose great shadow will bury thee."

"That Heaven's gate may the wider be."

A light laugh was wafted back to the monk as she drove away.

When the lumbering coach was out of sight he kept his glances upon the servant that caused the lady so much annoyance by his tardiness. He was a lusty fellow with brawn and muscle, and wiry as a leopard. His low, retreating forehead and deep-set eyes showed the cunning of an assassin. A great desire possessed the monk to run the man through with his sword.

The ruffian kept well to the rear, and was content to follow at a safe distance, where the houses were few and scattering. When the main part of the city was just in front, his shadow glided rather than walked at closer distances. To purposely mislead him, the pursued monk turned many corners; still this man dogged his steps. A happy thought came to him. He speedily darted behind the nearest corner where the shadows were deepest and awaited the arrival of the unsuspecting victim. The priest shot out his right arm straight from the shoulder and landed a blow on the assassin's face that knocked him senseless. With hasty steps he doubled back on his tracks and darted into a costumer's shop, where he purchased

a heavy cowl of brown serge and threw it over his habit. A procession of monks was passing at the time; without more ado he fell into the line and marched away.

Without further trouble he came to the caravansary for indigent monks. They asked him no questions, and he asked them for information that would guide his uncertain footsteps. The diplomatic atmosphere of the Eternal City was more dangerous than the miasma of the Pontine Marshes. Every friend was more to be dreaded than the stiletto of a bravo. The grave responsibility was on his soul, yet was his heart loyal to his king, whose tottering throne was propped by broken promises.

Fortune befriended him. The next morning these brothers, who were like himself pilgrims, were going to St. Peter's. An especial mass was provided for them. Again they formed in line. Quickly he threw the best friend that he had over his own robes of gray and marched to the chapel, where the kneeling monks formed a semi-circle at the foot of the altar.

The King's messenger did not arise with the brothers, but remained on his knees, while these pilgrims filed meekly out to the court. His quick eye noted the dog that was the counterpart of Nattie's dog; some of the family were near. Looking carefully around, he discovered a kneeling figure that had the petit proportions of the maiden he so fiercely loved. He drew nearer and knelt by her side. "Stay, lady, do not go, I would speak with thee; that I may do so with safety, appear thou at thy devotions; other eyes are on us."

"God, thou hast answered my prayer; my lover is with me again. I can ask no more of Thee." She prayed thus softly, while he answered in a like manner:

"Thou sayest truly; I am beset with dangers, help thou me."

Florette in a devotional manner continued: "'Tis well that I met thee, my lover; the news of thy arrival is bruited through Rome. A hundred stilettos are on thy track, ready to murder thee; for this I came to this little chapel, and Dareall followed at my bidding, that thou wouldst know thy little Florette that would die for thee."

"Speak not of dying, rather sayest thou that thou wilt live for me; give me of the advice that will aid me. I would see His Holiness, yet how this may be I know not. What hast thou to offer that my mission may be ended?"

"Seek thou the English Ambassador, who, knowing thy rank among the nobility, he will do thee the offices thou desireth."

"Nay, nay, thou simple-hearted child; go thus, to share the fate of the indiscreet, whose sorry speech would make my body a target for a thousand stabs. I am made of better stuff. Trust me for prudence, that human virtue that maketh safety a pathway to success. Hast thou naught else to offer?"

"Then thou seest him not, I know not how this matter may be arranged. If thou art a pilgrim, and with thy brotherhood make supplication, perchance the audience may be accorded thee."

"Didst thou not tell me in Dantima that His Holiness led a secluded life, that a garden filled with nature's loveliness invited him to its seclusion, where he meditates upon holy themes at certain hours of the day?"

"In good sooth did I tell thee as much; thou remembered well. The papal guard would say thee nay at the point of the halbert; the great bronze enclosure guards the person of the Pope. Perchance, and thou goest at the

hour of four, thou wilt cast thy eyes upon him as he walketh to and fro, but this will not gain thee thy desires."

"If I venture not, then am I a goslin; show me but the way thither, and I address myself not to the head of the Church, then thou mayest write me down a fool. Tell me of thyself; where dwellest thou that I may find thee when the duty's performed."

"Seest thou not the guardians of this place do feast their eyes upon us? Turn not thy head so much as a hair's breadth, but double thy devotions, and I will depart ere thou goest, and will be slow of gait outside these holy walls."

When the maiden arose, he raised his voice and redoubled his devotions. The monotonous tones of his voice quieted the suspicion. The watching acolytes disappeared.

When he crossed himself and passed out of the great doors, he hesitated and looked to the right and left for the maiden. Again the dog guided his footsteps. As he turned the corner, he noted the direction Florette was taking, which brought him to the bronzed gate with the papal crest over the entrance. This entrance was closed. The fence extended to the corner, where it made a sharp turn. When he had fixed the position of each sentry, he went by the nearest way to the caravansary, where he was lost in his devotion to Florette and the King.

Thus he sat munching his brown bread and water till the shadows on the wall admonished him that the time for action had arrived. The distance was not great. He placed his hand upon the package that had perhaps the destiny of a nation in the safe delivering, and started forth. His going was unnoticed, as the brothers came

and went at will. His vision was sharpened by danger, his cavalier blood was at fever heat. He loosened the double-edged dagger from its sheath and came up to the bronze enclosure farthest removed from the gateway. A solitary guard paced to and fro.

The King's messenger drew near to the tall railing and peered within. The challenge of the guard made him draw back not one whit. Then the rude voice exclaimed: "Stand thou back from the bronze moulding, or I run thee through with this spear that never yet hath been stained with human blood."

"Nay, good soldier, I blame thee not for the ordering of thy duty. Restrain thy imperious temper, the evil one will find consolation in thy fiery moods. I did but come to gaze upon His Holiness. I came from afar, and thou wouldst deny me this poor boon, that cost thee nothing?"

"Move thou on, my orders must be obeyed."

"A pilgrim from Arabia am I; knowest thou, good soldier, the distance thence? A thousand good leagues of sea and land it is. One sight of His Holiness will repay the tediousness of the journey."

"It may not be as thou wisheth; move on!"

"Ten golden lires will I give thee, and thou gettest the Pope's blessing for me. Stand with thy halbert at my heart, and if I betray thee in this matter, then send the weapon home, and thou art quits of thy duty."

"There he walketh, and alone; give me first the golden lires, and it shall be as thou desireth; but be thou cautious till yon acolyte cometh within hail."

"Edmondo, mark thee, have thou speech with His Holiness, be pleased to say to him that a pilgrim that hath traveled from far Arabia humbly prays for his blessing

ere he returneth to his apartments, then will I give thee a bright golden lire."

The sight of the coin hastened the youth's steps. He stood before His Holiness, and on bended knee delivered the message which was given to him by the guard. The holy man sayeth naught, yet did he follow the acolyte to the spot where stood the devout pilgrim. A grave smile played over the Pope's features as he benevolently asked: "Thou pilgrim, it is little that thou asketh of me; be it according to thy desire. Kneel where thou art and receive the blessing."

"Holy Father, surely Heaven hath directed thy footsteps to bless me, as thou wilt see when it is thy pleasure to read these despatches with the great seal of England upon them. They will vouch for my good faith and repay me an hundred fold for the hidden dangers that encompassed me on every side. Read them and I will await thy gracious pleasure."

A look of surprise was perceptible on the features of His Holiness. When he had mastered the contents, straightway he came to the group and said: "Thou cometh in questionable habiliments, Sir Jasper. This is a poor reception to one who cometh from so great a kingdom. Go thou to the entrance and I will be with thee; there is much I would learn from thee."

The Pope and the King's messenger were secluded in one part of the garden. That matters of import were being discussed was evident, for with the telling a frown mantled the face of His Holiness, as the messenger continued:

"Standeth the statecraft of England so? These papers forecast a gloomy future. The roundheads make bold cause against the Crown. A constant warfare between

King Charles and his parliament unsettleth the times. I would that His Gracious Majesty had more decision in his rulings."

"His friendship is as much to be feared as his anger. He that trieth to carry the cares of state on both shoulders maketh of himself a slave to those who question his motives, that they may pull him down."

"Young sir, thou speaketh boldly in this matter; wert thou in England it had cost thee thy head. Thou art safe here; speak freely, that I may know how to aid this unhappy King."

"Your Holiness, the ball that hath been buffeted from hand to battledore must needs receive some scars. The King's humors are as fickle as the smile of fortune; he loseth the friends he should retain and gaineth the friends that he should lose. Think not I am disloyal to my King, the bluntness of my speech is for the furtherance of his cause."

"Come to the Vatican; these papers are overdue, I have been expecting them these many days. My secretary will make return despatches. Well do I know that I can trust thee to the fulfilling of this mission. I have but to look upon thy resolute face and my question is already answered."

"Nay! Your Holiness, I go not back to England. Here is a letter from the Queen which will ask of thee that which my heart desireth most."

An amused smile, that grew broader as he advanced in the reading thereof, played over the kindly expressioned features. "So, so!" he said; "it standeth thus with thee and thy affairs? The Queen hath pleaded thy case so well that it behooves me to grant thy request; besides, thy sword is more to King Charles at this time than

would be a cowl and hood; he sorely needeth stout troopers."

The document that absolved him from his churchly vows was placed in the hands of the King's messenger. What a load was lifted from his heart. In his joy at this act of kindness he embraced the knees of His Holiness and said: "Thou king-maker, how my heart warms to thee; do as much for my unhappy land and all England will bless thee."

"Thou art a manly subject of the King; thou hast my blessing for a duty well performed. Peace go with thee; and now, farewell."

The acolyte accompanied the King's messenger to the entrance. With an additional ten lire he gained the respect of the papal guard and passed out to search for the habitation of Florette. "Thus have I fulfilled one great mission; how will the other end, ah! who can know?"

He approached the great forbidden pile of masonry with some caution. At a distance it arose as some grand old ruin, but when he drew nearer, the regularity of its walls became more harmonious. The shadow of the large court made the place inviting, because the heat was enervating. Dareall came forward to meet him. A friendly sniff and a wag of his tail were the dumb greetings he received. Farther on he met the dark-eyed maiden of the cliff, whose hands were extended in a welcome that made his heart a castle of pleasure.

"Glad am I to see thee, for thy face bespeaketh success. Thou hast delivered the King's despatches. Thou shalt tell me of the interview while we sit in the shadow of this broken column that once graced one of the temples of proud Rome. I am all impatient to hear the success of thy freedom from thy vows to the Church."

A relieved feeling came to him; the secrets of state were sacred. Although this maiden was as the preciousness of gold to him, yet could he not impart to her the matters that passed between His Holiness and himself. "The better to answer thee, I will first show thee the instrument that maketh me free from the foolish vows of Dantima."

"Say thou not that the vows were foolish, since the cowl and hood hid neath its folds the burning letter, my lover. Thy garb made our meetings doubly precious, since the cruel edicts of that burgh harmed thee not because of thy holy calling."

She sat closer as he drew her hand in his. Shyly her head lay on his shoulder. His mental gaze was far from the Eternal City. He could feel the heated sands of the desert blister his feet, just as this parting blistered his heart. Love plead with him to stay, but the invisible hand of destiny said move on; the burning letter on his breast made destiny his master.

"Knowest thou, my idol, that we must part for a season. I would be rid of this wager that hath robbed me of so much happiness. Ah! but it goeth hard with me to give thee up."

"We can return to Dantima. There is but one world for wedded bliss, and this world will be all our own."

"My future hopes do play hide and seek, twixt duty and thee; thy presence maketh me a coward, when I should be brave. Stern resolution, come thou now and be my mentor ere I surrender to the beckoning of love."

"Dost thou weigh it against my love, that would keep thee at my side forever, then thou dost not love me?"

"Bethink thee, Florette, should I remain in Rome, the King will recall me ere this letter be removed; should we

return to Dantima, then His Majesty will straightway send a summons that I dare not disobey. Know thou that I was a good fortnight imprisoned in the Tower? But for the friendship of the Queen, my head would have been the price of silence."

"Thou art right in the reasoning of our cause; thy safety lieth in travel. Here upon the tombs of fallen greatness we will renew the vows of old Dantima, and pray that thy mission may come to a happy and speedy termination."

"Thus I seal it with the truest kiss that ever plighted lover's troth."

"On the forfeit of thy life, ne'er mention the part I played in aiding thee to deliver the despatches that thou broughtest from England. My father is an enemy of the King, my mother knowest not my love for thee; be silent and trust me, and all cometh well."

One long and close embrace, and the King's messenger hastened from Florette, who sat as one deserted. She laid her hot forehead on the base of the Corinthian column and wept till her eyes were dry. Dareall stood by her side and with almost human intelligence he licked her cold hand. This act of love recalled the hour, and Florette returned to take up the thread of life as it came from the weavers of time.

Sir Jasper hurried to the caravansary that he might shorten the year of absence, and prepare to embark on the Mediterranean Sea. Rapidly he wended his way through the dark and dirty streets of the Eternal City, unheeding the stealthy steps that kept in unison with his own. A bag was thrown over his head; a sharp blow from some blunt weapon rendered him senseless. Half stunned and suffocating, he was hurried along for some distance,

dragged into a house, rolled in a carpet and left to recover his senses.

The sack was removed, his hands were freed from the cords that bound them, he was permitted to rise. The apartment was luxuriously furnished. In wonderment he reclined upon one of the couches, while he rubbed his swollen limbs where the bonds had cut into the flesh. While he was thus occupied, a light step hastened along the hall, the door opened, the fascinating woman whose wiles were the seals of diplomacy stood before him.

"Thou art surprised, my cavalier monk, that thou art my guest. Since my invitation that I first extended to thee was so lightly appreciated, why nolens-volens, per force, thou visiteth me, as thou seest. Thou art not in a dungeon, but in one of the palaces of the Cæsars. It was in a barbarous manner that thou gavest me the slip. Such a blow as thou gavest unto my servant! Truly, thou hittest hard for a follower of the meek and lowly Christ. Our acquaintance was too agreeable to be so rudely discontinued. Possess thy soul in patience until I will it that thou depart."

The King's messenger was amazed at the woman's manner of speech. Doubt made him suspicious. "Madam," he said, "thou hast made some grave mistake. What thou takest me for, I know not; enlighten thou my dull understanding."

"We have no designs upon thee as an individual. When thou comest as a bearer of despatches from King Charles, then it behooveth us to learn the contents of the matters that have a far-reaching influence upon the future of thy merry England."

"As the King's messenger then will I depart. Thy wits have deserted thee, and go begging for something

better to do. Thou didst not observe that His Grace imprisoned me in the Tower; through the influence of the Queen was my life spared."

"Thou art Sir Jasper, and I mistake not. Oft have I seen thee at court, thou favorite of King Charles; but as thou sayest, it were an ill sign of courtly favor to spend thy hours in counting the stones in a prison wall.

"Then why camest thou to Rome, masquerading in the gown of a monk? Tell me the truth, thy answers will be thy liberty, or they will consign thee to a dungeon; make thy choice as suiteth thee best."

"Knowest thou, strange woman, that I took holy orders in Dantima, and am bound to the Church of Rome. It was a foolish wager that cost me all the sorrows of a gentle heart. For this I came to the Eternal City. I saw His Holiness, the Pope; he was pleased to grant me a full dispensation."

"Then thou art a monk no longer, and life hath its alluring charms; then why weareth thou the cowl and hood that hide thy fair proportions? All the solemn prayers that thou hast said then go for naught, and uncertainty hath possession of my better judgment."

"Turn thou the light to a glimmer by the shading thereof, then thou wilt believe that the Church's good offices were welcomed with goodly grace. As for thy threats of imprisonment, I will prove to thee thy threats are but the vaporings of a boast."

The monk pulled back the partings of his cowl, then the letter of living fire lighted the apartment with its unholy lustre. It became bright and brighter, until its presence dazzled the wonder-stricken woman, who stared at the strange marking that fascinated her with all the potency of a serpent's charm.

"Hide it from me," she moaned; "its glare is eating into my brain. Oh! this is something terrible. Thou strange man, what hast thou been doing to the evil spirits that they marked thee thus?"

"For a foolish wager I remained the night in the cottage on the Devil's Elbow. Roughly they did fling me about as a feather borne on the wings of a storm, and for a remembrance they did mark me thus."

"Thou knowest Florette, then? It was there that she lived until King Charles' troopers drove them from thence. She ne'er told me of thy adventure, or I had treated thee with more consideration."

"Lock securely thy door, and I will prove to thee how little locks and bars restrain me from the liberty that is my divine inheritance." He moved toward the portal; noiselessly it swung backwards on its hinges. Some unseen hands shot the bolts back into their sockets. "Tell me, madam," he said, "what power on earth could prevent me from delivering the despatches?"

"I have wronged thee, Sir Jasper. I would know more of this uncanny adventure. Not now, but later."

"Thou knowest now why my heart is such a tempest-tossed sea, and my face is an open book for school girls to read."

Silence brooded between them. She gazed with passionate devotion upon the handsome face that reminded her of the picture of Christ. His hood was thrown back with a careless grace that permitted the soft brown curls to fall in profusion upon his shoulders. This softened the outlines of his symmetrical features. The longer she gazed the more her woman's heart went out to him in his strange life. The cavalier she would have assassinated

became the idol of her heart. She rang a silver bell and waited.

"Pelegrino, show this gentleman to the blue chamber."

"I must be gone, for each day is a delay unto my recompense. But for this adventure I would be sailing on the sea where drains the Tiber."

She led him to a window and exclaimed: "Behold, thou of the obdurate heart, the blackness of the night is upon thee. Thy life were worth a rushlight, and thou venturest abroad. Be my guest until the morrow, and thy heart will be glad that thou didst tarry with me. Thou knowest me not, and perchance thou wilt never know me; thou art as safe within these walls as thou couldst be in the King's chambers; it is yet four hours until the dawning."

The downy sense of ease made tired sleep a blessing; at least this strange woman thought so, as she touched a hidden spring and crept into his room. His breathing was deep and regular. For a moment she watched him from the secrecy of the heavy purple curtains. With a calm assurance, this incarnate embodiment of beauty glided to the couch whereon lay his doublet and hose, the swift fingers abstracted the papers that were worth a life to him, and retired. Nothing aroused any further suspicion; her mind was satisfied.

How long he slept he knew not; the cobwebs of slumber hung heavily on his eyes, because there was not a ray of light in the darkened chamber. Thus he lay until a valet knocked loudly at the door, the tapers looked like stars on a dark sky, so feeble were their rays. When he was refreshed by a bath, he quitted the room, descended a flight of steps and was ushered into the presence of this feminine mystery.

"'Tis thus, thou cavalier monk, that I receive thee. Knowest thou that night is upon us? Thy heavy lids did exact from Heaven's bounty thy needed rest. Thou art another man to-day; a day-time's sleep hath brought thee to a pleasure that will repay thy sloth. Come, the repast awaits thee, and I, thy hostess, bid thee eat, for thy stomach must claim of thee a double allowance, since it hath been cheated of its dues."

His long fast gave to the tasting of the viands a hungry relish that increased with every mouthful. His wit and humor were contagious, yet the wine on the table was untouched. He sighed as she filled the glasses to the brim with the vintage of ancient time, which she, noticing, said:

"Dost sigh when such nectar is had for the quaffing? Knowest thou that this wine was found in the ruins of Pompeii? Roman lips touched the brim of the glasses that we use to-day. Drink sparingly, or thy wits will be wandering ere thou canst quaff the contents."

A troubled expression came like a cloud over his high spirits, as he said: "I wager a crown that thou wilt not drink the toast with me this day. Set the wine down unless thou wouldst mar the enjoyment of this hour."

"Drink to thy success in the far east, and to the Devil with that letter on thy breast, that it may harm thee no more."

The glasses were raised to their lips, but the wine was ne'er tasted. "What is the solemn music that cometh to my ears?" She marveled at its sweetness.

Full and fuller came the weird notes in one grand swell that filled the apartment and lingered as if they were unwilling to die away. "It is a miserere," she gasped. Her colorless face was turned towards the monk,

who was on his knees; again was the crucifix raised above his head. In a mournful tone of voice he chanted the answer; then the chords dissolved into silence.

"In Heaven's name, what meaneth this strange happening? My hair standeth on ends and my very flesh creepeth as though it were endowed with legs. Thou unhappy man, I cannot ask thee to stay, if thou wouldst go hence."

For the second time the arms were around his neck. the same musical voice plainly said, "Move on!"

"Who spoke them? Who said 'Move on?' Is my mind wandering from this material body, that spirits should do such things. Where came the music from, thou wizard of the world? I would know more than thou canst tell to me."

"It cometh from the Cathedral of Dantima. These be my brothers that send a warning to me across the sea."

"The arms around thy neck, how sayest thou? Dost Florette know of these?"

"Right well she knoweth of all this; 'twas on the Devil's Elbow that such things came to me. Dost thou blame me for banishing this baleful influence."

"Hast thou hope, my solemn cavalier, that thou shouldst brave the dangers of such a journey? Thinkest thou of the miles of weary travel, the parching of the tongue with thirst, the Bedouins, robbers of the desert, with naught to guide thy weary footsteps across the burning sands."

"Seest thou this parchment? I got it from an alchemist in Dantima. Here and here, and there, is the duplicate of the strange character. I know naught of Arabian lore, yet did the alchemist say the routing that this writing explains should be followed by me."

"Enough of this horror that placeth props to mine eyes that I may not sleep for a week. To the reception room, where thou wilt find those who have been banished from England and await the downfall of King Charles. Canst thou blame us for plotting that we may rehold the estates that have been confiscated to the Crown that His Majesty may reward some favorite that has done his bidding with a right good will."

"Blame me not for the horror that has sobered thee; it was at thy bold challenge that the spirits came. Forget it and be happy."

They moved along stately halls, where softened light fell upon niches filled with statuary that had graced some Roman Emperor's court. The exquisite forms of cold marble were dreams of the artists who carved them, artists whose names were forgotten. The velvet curtains were parted by the shapely hands that would have sent the blade of a stiletto into his heart and lauded the deed as an act of faith.

"Thou seest here in this goodly company the bluest blood of England, yet are they exiles from the land that bore them, thanks to thy master, who ruleth Albion to her destruction."

"In good sooth, right well are they entertained by thee that hath the wealth of Croesus. Since thou art mistress of such a pile as this that shameth England's castles, tell me thy name, thou courtly dame, and I will cry thee quits for the nonce."

A sweet laugh was the answer that he received for his over-inquisitiveness.

"It is scant courtesy thou wilt receive within this hall, as thou art one of His Majesty's loyal subjects. There is one here that will make thee amends for the dis-

courtesy. Turn thou thy head neither to the right nor to the left; follow thy nose to yon draped pillar of marble, and thy happiness shall make thee forget that the apartment is filled."

Florette quickly changed the traces of sorrow that made such assembling a penance. She extended both hands, and in a bewildered way naively asked: "This is passing strange that thou shouldst be here, my lover. I pictured thee as sailing on yon great sea to the land of thy deliverance. How sayest thou to my questionings?"

"Ask the one that speaketh to the officer in the uniform of a British admiral; she will tell thee that which tormenteth my soul. She is thy friend, I will be sworn, for she led me hither."

"Enough to know that thou art with me; yet I would not have my father see us together for a jeweled crown. Go to yon turn in the hall and I will follow speedily. I have that to tell thee which will make thy heart glad. We sail for that newly-discovered land named America, where we will remain for a twelve-month, and then we sail for Dantima, where thou wilt find me when thou and thy letter parteth company. My prayers are for thy safe return, my king, my lover."

When the mistress approached this couple, she made her presence known by a slight cough. They had observed her as she swept across the marble pavement. She shook her finger in coquettish manner and quietly exclaimed:

"Knowest thou the hour, thou love-stricken doves, that do coo and bill as though the wheels of time ne'er moved? Seest thou the hall is deserted, save by thee? Sir Cavalier Monk, it is my order that thou remaineth over night, thou

and thy promised bride shall go with me through the ruins of a former greatness."

Sir Jasper was loathe to go. The dangers that took on a thousand seeming shapes made him cling to the present with all of the strength of a man that drowneth in the sea. He could not give up this sweet maiden, whose happiness was dearer to him than his own soul. Thus he stayed. Florette was also a guest for the night.

Bright was the sun that came up in the east to light the colossal ruins that these lovers might wander in the shadows and replight their love where none might say them nay. "Come, my lover, I will show thee the Atrio Della Chiesa di St. Palo, with its endless rows of fluted columns and its choicest flowers. It is the realm of fairy-land. Now we will wander to the Fontana Trevi to listen to the musical plash of its waters, and sit in its cooling shade."

Thoughtfully they wandered midst the ruins of the Coloseo. They sat on one of the tiers of stone seats and looked over into the arena, just as the Roman populace did in the dead and buried centuries, when these Romans witnessed the gladiatorial contests that made butchery a holiday.

"Florette, this is the saddest day of my life. The future is so vague and uncertain. I dare not linger longer. King Charles will recall me. Betwixt imprisonment in the Tower and the dangers of the East my heart is a hot-bed of doubt. Yet the present is so enticing; how fleeting are its wings."

"Do not despair. I say this to thee, and yet am I in tears; but it must be that the future hath hope, and leaveth not the sting of disappointment to rankle in the wound that hath no healing."

"I thought not of this food, prepared by my friend, that hath been a friend indeed. Put it in thy doublet, it may be to thy liking later. We will retrace our steps, as the evening shadows come apace."

When they reached the palace, their hostess came hastily forward. She spoke in an excited manner.

"My cavalier monk, thou must leave Rome at once. It is as thou hast said, the King desireth thy return, and hath sent a messenger thither to summon thee hence. There is a sailing ship that leaveth in two hours. Follow thou the valet that I will send with thee; trust him and fear not. By to-morrow's sun thou wilt be on the high seas, where no order shall reach thee."

"How can I thank thee for this act of kindness, since it is so undeserved. I will be ready on the moment." He buckled his sword beneath his cowl, the cowl he purchased in Rome, and yet had he the robe of his order beneath the newer robe, that the fatal letter might not betray him to the ignorant, whose superstition was as fatal as death. His poniard he replaced in his bosom. With a hasty good-bye he followed the guide to the harbor, where his vessel lay. The sailors were even then bustling about the busy deck assorting the cargo and shipping the windlass that hoisted the anchor.

Thus they parted. The Widow Deycourt and her daughter were to sail for the shores of the great continent in the West, because the tongue of evil report had reached Rome. The slanderer that sent it was none other than the duchess, whose soulless persecution was as heartless as it was bold.

CHAPTER XIV.

CAPTAIN CARL RESCUES THE CAPTAIN OF THE MYSTERIOUS VESSEL.

THREE days after the departure of the King's messenger, the family of four reshipped their household effects on the cruiser and followed closely the conveyance that hauled them to the ship. The widow's husband was commander of the trimmest craft that ever showed a clean pair of heels to a British man-of-war. The ripple of the cut water filled them with joy, for a fresh breeze from shore sent the vessel out into the world of waters at a fast rate of speed; the Castle of San Angelo could not at King Charles' demand make them prisoners.

The captain did not own the cruiser; it was the property of the rich English woman that had treated them so kindly. The refugees that sought protection in a foreign land had an interest in the venture, and the despatches that caused the English King so much uneasiness came from the leaders of this colony. For this reason this officer was not at liberty to keep the vessel out of service for such a length of time. They were sailing away; this departure was a respite from the bitter persecution.

When the vessel with no name reached the shores of the new colony, the prospect was so gloomy that he felt like putting the ship about and returning to the Devil's Elbow. His reason for this move was that the roundheads had crippled the authority of King Charles by the dissolution of Parliament. The Lord Protector assumed authority that King Charles combatted. Thus the un-

happy country was plunged into a fratricidal war that had all of the elements of bitterness in it.

The freshness of the new country, with its primeval forests, its grassy slopes, its beautiful rivers, its strange people, savages, that roamed through its woods and hunted wild game, was refreshing. This change smoothed the touches of sorrow, for they said, here will none know us, and slander will be robbed of its venom. They settled at the head of a landlocked bay, where a thriving village had sprung up; but these staunch emigrants were round-heads, whose austerity carried their laws to the length of cruelty.

There were no idlers in this village, where they attended divine service with their firearms; the raids of the savages made such an innovation a necessity. He could but admire such stern fortitude that carved out of the wilderness a refuge where liberty of conscience was as free as the air of heaven. The deep snows that covered the earth did not deter them from tracking and killing wolves. The council that sat in the log-built meeting-house made their laws and enforced them. Breaking into a house was punished by branding the culprit on the forehead with a heated iron; thus the housebreaker carried the word "Thief" on his brow to his dying day.

Little he thought how these laws would cause him sorrow as he read them that he might obey. They were welcomed to the colony with that rough hospitality that made every new-comer an acquisition, because he was one more to fill the ranks of the train band that mustered twice a week. The notices for training were posted on the meeting house, that was used for a school, a council chamber and for preaching. The services of these coven-

anters lasted all day. Thus the fortunes of these wanderers were cast with these pilgrims.

The little family did their part in the duties of citizenship until an unforeseen circumstance changed the current of destiny and sent them back to the cottage on the cliff. It was in this wise, so said the chronicler: The Widow Deycourt was at a quilting at the far end of the village.

The log house was next to the forest; indeed, the long boughs of the trees shaded the roof. It was an all-day quilting, where cider and home-baked cakes were served on pewter vessels. The cakes were made from molasses that came from Barbadoes. Our chronicler sayeth naught of that which was whispered by these colonial dames, as the deft fingers sped the needles and fastened the squares of the quilts that made homely coverings to shield them from the storms of winter. They were seated around the frame that stretched the material. Alas! that our chronicler must say as much: these hardy dames gossiped. The blight again fell upon our unhappy family, yet no one accused them openly and fairly. A notice came to them by the court officer that they must leave the village.

"My wife, read thou the writing and what it sayeth. We must return to Dantima. Fortunately our cruiser will be here within the week. Knowest thou, my wife, the cause of this strange persecution?"

"Right well do I know the cause, my husband. There liveth one here who hath a sister living in London, an aunt of Carl's. Thou rememberest him; the youth that served us so faithfully when we sojourned in the cottage on the cliff? My face came to her as one out of memory. She stareth at me as one possessed; her tongue was not

idle, yet know I not the cause until thou bringest me this notice."

"Heaven help thee, my wife, take it not so hard. There is a just God in Heaven; else is religion a mockery. Thy wrongs shall yet be righted, and in a manner we little suspect. No one hath accused thee, my wife, and such things be."

"Naught will save me but the package of letters that hath mysteriously disappeared. It was not in the seaman's jacket, all else was there. There is naught to do but trust in the future that now seemeth dark enough."

The beginning of the week came, and with it the fine cruiser with its brass cannons that were polished and ready for use. There was no one to say good-bye. They came as they went, and the episode in the village was forgotten.

Their voyage was beset with storms and contrary winds, that drove them out of their course. For this reason they did not reach the cliff of Dantima till the month of June, when the foliage was at its best. As the King's men-of-war had been ordered elsewhere the ship, under cover of darkness, ran into her mooring beneath the cottage.

The sailors unshipped the long rope that opened the portals of this cavern that had once been a retreat for buccaneers. By the aid of the windlass the furniture was hoisted into the house on the cliff. The smoke again curled upwards from the chimneys and the old life began. The danger was lessened by the fear the burghers had for the troopers of King Charles, who were watching Dantima with anxious eyes.

Each week a company paraded on the square. These peaceful citizens were not allowed to have firearms. A

hundred troopers were more than a match for the surly malcontents that glared fiercely at the soldiers and said naught against the King, who was so busy at court that the cliff and its ghosts were lost in the maelstrom of exciting events.

The smoke did not have such a sulphurous tinge to the roundheads, who gazed at the devil's own, and pulled their steeple-crowned hats down lower over their eyes as they went about the streets and circulated the latest reports from London.

The clash of war had reached even to the gates of London. Fierce and sharp were the battles that were fought between the contending forces as they met on the roads that traversed England. During this time the cause of royalty was tottering to its fall, and the father of Florette was hastening this event.

Florette rejoiced that the family of the alchemist had moved to the metropolis, with its ever changing tide of restless humanity. The glen, and especially the grotto, were doubly dear to her, as she recalled with pleasing minuteness every incident of the monk's romantic courtship. The thought that he had the dispensation filled her heart with silent gratitude. She sang her home songs with a mellowness that was tinged with doubt, because the months had gone from them, yet had she not received any tidings from Sir Jasper.

While Florette was thus living over the past, Nattie and his father were planning to get the despatches into London, the despatches that had been sealed and delivered to the captain by the officer who was second in command of the cruiser. The danger of strolling bands of soldiers that were marauding the highways made the

undertaking especially dangerous. For this reason these persecuted wanderers dreaded the call of duty.

A call to duty that was exacting in its details. The captain called his son to his side and said: "Nattie, thou art well grown for thy years. I ken that thou must stand in my stead should I be hanged or shot. I am a seaman, but I am not a landsman. This adventure goeth against the grain of my judgment, because the disorganized soldiery are as fierce as pirates, and one knoweth not when they will take thee unawares, to thy misfortune."

"If thou goest, take with thee Dareall. He scenteth the danger from afar. Put the despatches in the collar that encircles his neck, and if they capture thee, why thou hast naught that will condemn an innocent pedler."

"Well said, my boy. I will don the clothes and be off. These papers should be e'en now in the hands of those who will know how to use them." When he had said this he went into his room and fitted the dingy suit of clothes to his person and arranged his pack that no suspicion would mar the perfection of his plans. Thrice he embraced those who were so near and dear to him and hurried along the glen until he was fully three leagues from the cottage; then he turned into the highway and assumed a stooping attitude that practice had perfected. He leaned heavily on the stout staff that had an innocent look, yet it was of sufficient heft to make it a dangerous weapon in the hands of a resolute man.

Often he met roving bands of soldiery, yet were these not harmful, for the reason that they were filled with rum. The jovial wag of their tongues and the clatter of their horses' hoofs on the hard ground deadened any sound that might come to them from the front.

When the pedler came up with such bands he stepped

to one side and hid behind the blackthorn bushes that skirted the length of the road until they were well out of earshot. He had made many leagues ere the sun was down, yet was he still a good half of the way distant from London; besides the most dangerous part of the duty was before him. The nearer he approached to the great city the more travelers he met. For this reason he passed the night in a field covered with underbrush. He could see from his place of concealment the watchfires at the stone bridge. Whether they were friends or foes he could not make this out, for the distance was too great.

As the stream was deep and wide he must perforce pass over the bridge or turn back and make a detour of many miles. He clenched his fists and made bold to advance to the sentries.

The barrel of a gun was leveled at him. A clear challenge rang out on the frosty morning air: "King or Commoner?" shouted the guard. "And thou halt not I will give thee that which will make thee more prompt of answer."

"Neither one nor the other. I am a poor wayfaring man that maketh his living by selling these trinkets that please the women. Naught do I know of this land, since I came from over the sea."

"Ho! this is a kettle of fish that is unsavory for the cooking. Thou art neither fish, flesh nor fowl. A foreigner, sayest thou? How long hast thou been in England? I have no orders to detain thee, since thou art neither of the King's subects nor art thou a follower of Cromwell. Go thy way in peace. Halt! It were well that I get further instructions from the captain of my relief."

The soldier gave a shrill whistle that brought from the

far end of the bridge a dozen of men who were filled with rum and swagger.

"David, what hast thou caught in thy net by thy challenge? a pedler, sayest thou? Come, thou decrepit son of trade; we will examine thy pack, and if aught of treason is hidden therein thou hangest by the neck without shrift or prayer."

They emptied his goods on the grass and found the papers that belonged to an estate in which the pedler was interested. They turned them over eight times, and every time they scrutinized them they became more suspicious.

"These smack of musty treason to good King Charles, or I have no knowledge of writing." Neither of these could read. The seals on the documents added to the perplexity of these men. The fiercest soldier spake and shouted: "We hang thee because thou art neither fish, flesh nor fowl. Thy country from whence thou camest can well spare thee. Hadst thou been a trooper of Cromwell we had shot thee, but thou art on neither side; we will hang thee to yon projecting limb."

"Thou canst not read the papers, and yet thou wilt murder an innocent stranger that goeth to his business in London. If thou canst not read them, call thou thy commander and he will tell thee there is naught of treason here; they are papers of the court, and belong alone to the law. The very mustiness of these should teach thee better. They were old when thou wert born."

"Seest thou yon preparation? Thou shalt not see the sun go down. We will divide thy pack, that the gewgaws may go to the women at home and thy body to the carrion crows."

They pinioned his feet and hands and had put the rope

about his neck, then the sentinel that halted him interfered.

"Stand away, thou drunken troopers of the King! I alone am he who should be beholden to King Charles. It was I that was on guard. The man hath done no grievous wrong. Wait till the morrow when our captain cometh; then if these papers smack of treason, I will be the first to hang him."

The pedler spake up and said: "If there be aught of treason in the package then I will tie the noose that strangles me."

"We will leave the dangling rope for the morrow, when our captain cometh."

They searched every pocket. When they had done this they bound him so that he could not escape. He sat through the long night gazing at the stars. The effort of a lifetime to be thus rudely plucked from him. Thrice the drunken soldiers attempted to burn the pack and the papers. What agony was so great as this? but the courage of the sentinel that halted him checked the disorder, and the package was saved from destruction.

The pedler watched the sun as it came up from the east. All of his hopes were centered in the officer that commanded the troop. The troopers all stood at attention as the captain acknowledged the salute, and in some surprise exclaimed: "What is this ye do, my men? Who stood watch on the bridge when the challenge was given?" He glanced around and saw the preparations that had been made. He saw the man lying on the ground, bound hands and feet. A flush of anger mantled his face as he inquired: "By whose authority was this done?"

A guardsman more old than the rest spake and said: "The prisoner is a foreigner, and is neither fish, flesh nor

fowl; a pedler that selleth his wares to the undoing of good King Charles. He hath papers that condemn him, and hadst thou not been so prompt in thy coming, he would ere this have sawed the air from the branches of yonder tree."

"Give me the papers, that I may read them."

The troopers gathered around their young captain, while he read distinctly so that they might understand the purport thereof.

"Unbind the prisoner. There is naught suspicious in the papers or the pack. Mount thee, my good troopers; we are ordered to London. David, ride thou double. Thou hast treated this unfortunate man in a barbarous manner. Give him thy horse to ride and a safe conduct he shall have to the city."

Turning to the prisoner, he spake: "Sir, 'tis well that my troop was at the bridge else had it gone harder with thee. This kingdom hath run riot with disorder and lawlessness ruleth the hour."

When they were a good furlong from the bridge the captain and the pedler rode on ahead of the column, while the noisy soldiers dropped behind to talk of the event that nearly cost Florette's father his life.

The officer spoke in a guarded tone to the man by his side. "Thou art not what thou seemest to be. Thou art related to the Widow Deycourt and her daughter. What the relationship may be, that I know not. Didst thou note how the dog wagged its tail at my approach? I helped Nattie carry the papers thou hast from the Custom House in Dantima to the foot of the hill where the cottage now standeth. Fear not to speak freely. Thou goest to London to consult an advocate concerning the estate?"

"I mistake not, and thou art Carl, the alchemist's son.

How lucky was the star that brought such a piece of good fortune to me. Ne'er had I reached my destination but for thee. Other favors that I recall make me thy debtor, for which God will bless thee."

"Not worth mentioning, I have forgotten it already. Right glad am I to see thee. Tell me of Florette and Nattie. Dwell they on the cliff? It shall be my pleasure to move my troop thither and see that no harm come to them."

"I am more than certain that they will give thee the welcome that thou deservest, as thou knowest about this case at law. How standeth the King's benches these uncertain times? Is justice meted out with a balanced scale, or is Cromwell to make new laws as to succession? Mayhap that I make this journey for naught; advise me and I will thank thee."

"That I cannot tell to thee. I am no counselor to make such distinctions. Find thou thy friend who imbibed legal lore from Oxford, and then he will hum and haw ere he giveth thee advice."

"Once safely landed in London I will seek the wisest counselors who keepeth in touch with the times. I lose naught by the waiting, since time will make the cause more just."

"We are nearing the city. One piece of advice I give to thee. Thou hast been in foreign lands and know not where the pitfalls lie. If thou lovest thine own, heed what I tell to thee. I do my duty to good King Charles, yet something whispereth to me that his cause is hopeless. The roundhead element gathereth strength daily. Their soldiers are better trained. The King hath lost his judgment to rule and anarchy reigneth in his kingdom."

"Is it so serious as this, my young friend? Now for

the advice that thou givest me. I promise thee that it will be heeded unto the end."

"Remain thou non-committal," Carl whispered; "yet for policy sake lean thou to the side of Cromwell, for if he is your enemy he will be just. Should England have this Lord Protector, the estate that thou lost by injustice shall come to thee again. My true sword shall serve His Majesty even unto the gates of death. I will meet with thee again in Dantima. Here we part. Shake thou not my hand else suspicion will attach to thee to thy injury."

The pedler dismounted and thanked the young officer in a clever manner. He stood for a moment on the street and watched the troop clatter down the paved avenue at a sharp trot. When the soldiers were out of sight he called the dog to his side, shouldered his pack, adjusted his staff and followed Dareall through the crowded streets until his guide stopped in front of a large stone building that was conspicuous by a bronzed knocker that was more ornamental than useful. He raised the metal high and let it fall with a sharp clang. The door was opened by a servant.

"Thou lookest with suspicion upon me," the pedler said. "Call thy master to the portal and he will give me welcome. Come, my good man, bestir thee, I wish not to stand prating with thee at this hour."

When the master of the house approached, the pedler gave a peculiar sign, which the owner seeing, straightway conducted the stranger to a sitting room. When the door was closed these men threw their arms around each other's necks and then sat down.

"It is a miracle that I see thee, my old friend. Hast thou the despatches that are overdue? Produce them, that I may make my orderings. Thou reachest me through fire

and flood. Rest thee till I return, for thou art fatigued. Thy face showeth me as much," saying which he hurriedly put on his hat and was gone.

When he returned his face was beaming with happiness, as he continued: "Not a word of the business that bringeth thee here until thou hast rested. Then thou canst tell me of the hairbreadth escape that must have come to thee. These be unsettled times. The highways are filled with lawless soldiers that would rob thee for the pence in thy purse or cut thy throat for the pleasure of killing. Good night, may heaven bless thee."

"John, see that we are not disturbed. Call us when the dinner is prepared. And hark ye, I am not at home to any one." When this aged servitor had bowed himself out, the distinguished barrister who had once been in the employ of the family cleared the table of everything and proceeded to unfold the papers that the pedler handed to him; he smoothed out the folds with a professional dignity and placed them in the order of their issuance, and took from a portfolio the legal documents that he, the counselor, had filed.

"Now we have them in order. I will examine them as they come to my hand from the right. It is a very old estate and dates back to the Norman Conquest. It has passed from one generation to another, and each generation that owned it has been persecuted in some way. It would be to me a doubtful inheritance, but the title clearly rests with thy wife, and in the King's chambers thou shalt be righted."

"How wilt thou dispossess the present incumbent, since she is hand in glove with His Majesty? and well thou knowest that she hath the most unprincipled counselor, and I will add, the most brilliant, in England."

"Thy case is not as well fortified as I could wish, yet it is strong enough to begin proceedings for evictment. A scheme cometh into my head that will prove more powerful than the law. Well thou knowest that she knoweth that she hath possession only by authority of the King. As his scepter slippeth from his hand so slippeth the confidence of this beautiful adventuress from her."

"I understand not the drift of thy thought. She cameth into possession as a defamer of the innocent, an infamy that had cost my wife her head but for timely flight, and now she is outlawed by a royal decree."

"Make a bold front and give her to understand that all of the documents are in our hands, and my judgment for it that she maketh a hasty exit, especially so since her Lord Protector hath little authority to say thee nay."

"Thy plotting is excellent, but who will tell this to her? Right well thou knowest that her assassins would make short work of my endeavors, should I go thither. It is not thus that I wish a settlement."

"I ask thee not to go. I will be the agent that accomplisheth this in as neat a manner as if thou hadst done the same thyself. I will have this bundle of formidable vouchers to make the deception more complete."

"Good! I will remain closely housed whilst thou goest thy way. King Charles hath little liking for me or mine. I venture not to cross swords with him until this legal affair is at its clearance."

"Dinner is waiting our presence. When we have dined I will order my vehicle and make my best bow to this high-titled dame, who hath carried affairs with a high hand in the heyday of King Charles' greatness. I will be mindful of thy safety in this matter and mislead her. She

is overshrewd in her calling, and will surmise that the papers came to me by thy hands."

Having delivered himself of this harangue, he climbed into the clumsy coach and drove to the Ashton Park, where he had little difficulty in gaining admittance, as the grand-dame was watching his approach from the window.

When he entered the drawing room she advanced to meet him with a pleasing smile.

"Mr. Weilford, I believe I mistake not, and thou art the barrister that hath the case of so-called Widow Deycourt."

"Thou hast truly said. I came to have counsel with thee. The papers that have so long been laid away have at length been brought to the light of day. Thou knowest what this meaneth. Wilt thou give possession of this property in a peaceful and law-abiding manner, or shall I put thee before the King's bench? Thou hast thy choice."

"Wouldst thou permit me to see the papers thou speakest of, and I will give thee answer on the morrow. Well, thou knowest a woman's wit is the surprise of counselors, even unto those who stand high at the bench, as thou dost stand. Here is a table. I see there be many documents."

Not abashed, the counselor proceeded to comply with her wishes, which she seeing, interrupted him by saying: "It is enough. I wish not to trace these musty deeds to my undoing." She said this with a weary air, that had despair in the silence. She raised her hands to her hair in a dazed way that had a weary significance in this that it pleased the barrister, yet showed he no signs that exultation was uppermost in his thoughts.

"On the morrow will I give thee an answer. I must

consult my counselor ere I go a step in this matter. Show the gentleman out, Pierre, and return to me at once."

When the servitor came into her presence, she angrily exclaimed: "Why didst thou not tell me of the arrival of those papers. I am undone by thy negligence, and the papers are in his counselor's hands."

"Knowest thou, my mistress, that the man thou wisheth most to apprehend is in the city. I was powerless to harm him, since he was guarded by the King's troopers. He rode to the barracks with them. I know not where he stayeth. He came as a pedler."

"This is all the report thou hast to make. Fie on thee, Pierre; thou art not the shrewd servitor that thou hast been in former years. I told thee to waylay him, and take from him that which would save me my estate, and now thou comest empty handed to me."

"My mistress, I was powerless. The soldiers guarded him. The sharp trot of the horses was faster than I could run, and I know not the troop that came with him."

"Go to; this is the first time thou hast failed me. Give orders that the coach be brought to the side door, and I will be ready on the moment."

This disappointed woman alighted at the palace and without ceremony she sought the King, who was in deep dejection. He merely raised his head and said: "What wouldst thou? Thou trouble breeder; thy affairs are now more important than affairs of state."

"Your Majesty, the game is in thy hands. The nobleman that gave thee so much trouble is in London. He came from Dantima direct, where the family are now. Get thee the warrant ready and I will place him in thy power."

His Majesty spoke peevishly: "Let him stay. He can

do me now no harm. All of my plans maketh no front against this Cromwell, who hath hedged the Divine right of kings till naught is left of my power. Had my friends been zealous in my cause this had not happened. Brave Sir Jasper was true to me and worth a kingdom full of such hot-headed fools that fawned only to flatter, and he wandereth like a jackdaw in some foreign land upon a senseless errand that will cost him his life. He hath cool-headed brains, and would have balked the roundheads in council as well as in war. Go to. I will do naught for thee and thy cause."

The duchess withdrew from the King's presence in a hot temper; yet dared she not to say even so much as a word. When she was alone in her beautiful home she sought not to send for her counselor, but made preparations for a hasty flight. "The last hope is gone; yet am I not a pauper. I have hoarded these diamonds like an avaricious miser."

As she said this she gazed lovingly at the gems that had a thousand eyes to charm her. "Well I love thee, since thou standeth between me and penury. I have my chateau outside of Paris, and the pricing of these would ransom even King Charles. I leave to those that come after me a goodly inheritance of debt that the taxing of Cromwell will increase.

"How will I watch for Sir Jasper when he returneth from his mad expedition. I will woo him with my charms, and thus break the silly maiden's heart." She glanced out upon the lawns and noted that the stars were in the sky. She gathered her valuables within a small compass and fled. When morning dawned she was on the stormy English Channel heading for France.

The flight of the duchess was soon noised abroad by

the servants, who clamored for the wages due to them, which same coming to the ears of Mr. Weilford, he imparted to the happy man that stood in the middle of the room and wept. "Nay, my friend," the counselor remarked; "it is better to weep for joy than it is to weep for misfortune. The place is thine to have and to hold unless Cromwell say to thee nay. It hath come to my ears that he is a just man, although he hath an iron will. Upon thy petition he will make thy title good."

"How will I ever be able to repay thee for the time and money spent in this proceeding, or how can money repay thee for the unalterable friendship thou hast at all times extended to us when the frowns of fortune were as dark as the hinges of Hades. Not once hast thou faltered in the well doing."

"Have done with thy thanks, and I will tell thee how thou canst repay me. Move into thine own ere it is sequestered to the crown and we are quits."

"Yet I would give it all for the bundle of letters that Providence it seemeth hath overlooked. What is a good name? It is the fairest possession that honor bequeaths. What are lands and houses in comparison to this?"

"Grieve thou not. God doeth all things well, and even in this He is with thee, as the future will develop. Justice must have its course as truly as the seasons come and go. Thou must set out for Dantima this day, and I will occupy Ashton Park till thou returnest to thine own."

Without adventure he reached Dantima and brake to the dear ones the tidings that were received in silence. They were not overjoyed that they would again resume their old life while the charge of poisoning hung over the widow who had suffered for so many years.

CHAPTER XV.

THE KING'S MESSENGER SAILS FOR ARABIA.

Sir Jasper hurried to reach the decks of the ship that was bound for Alexandria. The accommodations of this craft were of the poorest, and the fare was even worse, though the price for the voyage was reasonable enough. He never quitted the spot where he could get the last glimpse of Rome until the vessel was well under way. Then the fear of the messenger King Charles sent became the least part of his thoughts.

He was hungry. The homely fare sat not well on his stomach. Then he bethought himself of the lunch that Florette had placed in the pouch of his cowl. When the last vestige of land had sunken behind the horizon he ate a part of the food with a hungry relish; yet he did not eat extravagantly, but placed the remainder in the pocket from whence he had withdrawn it, because the sensation of hunger that once possessed him was satisfied.

The sails filled out at once. The breeze was sending her on her way without so much as a change in her course. A lonesome feeling crept into the nobleman's heart as he looked over the taffrail at the foam as it glided from the sides of the seasoned oak and came together again far behind, he bethought himself of his own venturous life and his love for Florette. The omen seemed a good one. "May it be like these waters with us and our love," he murmured.

He said this as he turned his face to the passengers that gathered in a knot on the forward part of the ship. Upon these depended the pleasant hours of the voyage,

He scanned their faces slowly. The movement did not please his fastidious taste. There were among the passengers all nationalities. The turbaned Turk with his serious face; the negro with his black skin; the prosperous merchant with his cargo of goods, and the Mongolian with his dark features and straight hair; these were his companions.

He had little to say to those who understood English; those that could not speak his language he avoided. Thus the days dragged along. At night he would watch the phosphorescent glow that played upon the waves with a restless gleam that died away only to be renewed. He drank in great draughts of salt sea air and thanked God that it was no worse than the present gave to him.

The cabin was small and uncomfortable. For this reason he sought the deck and rolled up in his blanket. He slept soundly. The pleasant rocking of the vessel invited deeper sleep.

The captain of the ship came to him, and with a rough shake awakened the sleeping messenger. The seaman spoke in broken English, and asked the monk to go below. He (the passenger) sprang to his feet at once. He cast his eyes over the face of the sky that was clear when he laid down to sleep. Now not a patch of stars was visible. The heavy bank of clouds seemed to scud before the wind with remarkable speed. The sailors had done their work well, for every sail was clewed down and the hatches had been secured so that the waves that washed over the ship could not scuttle her.

Sir Jasper had been careless with his cowl when he fell asleep. The high wind that almost threw the craft on her beams end left him little time to secure the folds of his robe; firmly he held to the ratlins of the shroud, be-

cause he was fearful that he would be washed overboard. While he was thus clinging to the rigging a strange thing happened, and one that shaped the destiny of his future wanderings.

A blow on the head felled him to the deck. When he recovered his senses the dark visages of the sailors were gleaming above him. Their looks were ugly enough. He sprang to his feet and stood at bay. While he was thus posed his quick eyes observed something lying on the deck. He picked it up; it was a frigate bird that was only stunned. It was this that smote him so sharply and exposed the fatal letter.

The effect on the sailors was indescribable. They glared at him in horror. In their language they kept up such a babel that he could hear their noise above the roaring of the storm. Then it came to him what it meant. In their superstition they attributed the coming of the storm to his presence on board. He kept his fingers closed on the handle of his poniard; while he held the bird in the other hand, he thus addressed it:

"Thou white-winged messenger from the vast deep, why shouldst thou reveal the secret that burns into my brain like fire, that others may persecute me? Thus do I forgive thee the misfortune thou hast brought upon me." Gently he loosened the pinioned wings; the bird sped away and became a gleam in the darkness, a homeless wanderer like unto himself.

The monk could see by the light from the binnacle lamp that they were talking about him. Every now and then they pointed towards him in a threatening manner. The captain approached him and said:

"Thou must go overboard; thou art some strange being that this world knoweth not; for this reason thou

must die by thine own hands. Thou must cast thyself into the sea, that all on board may live. What is one life to a hundred. See, the sky grows blacker, the men refuse to work. I have too much in this bark to be responsible for. Stand thou here and when I give the word, thou must jump."

"Since death is so certain, and one man weigheth so little against a hundred, it is to my thought that there are other ways less barbarous." With the ending of his saying, he drew his sword and fiercely exclaimed: "If I die for a superstitious belief, others shall die in the assault; life is as dear to me as thine is to thee. Give me yon boat that swings from the davit of the ship, and the oars thereof, and I go in peace."

The captain went aft, and in some tongue not known to the doomed man he spake for ten minutes. The harangue had some effect, because he noted that these seamen answered by a nod of approval. The owner stepped up to him and repeated in English what he said to his men, "Get into the boat, and I will lower thee gently by holding tightly to this rope, where the pulley swings above." When the wind lulled sufficiently, the King's messenger with difficulty climbed into the yawl. This was a dangerous feat, for the reason that the roughness of the surface of the sea made the ship pitch forward and sidewise in a very uncomfortable manner.

When all was ready and the moment propitious, the small boat was lowered to the trough of the sea. A great wave with a white crest carried him away from the vessel into the darkness. With manly courage he grasped the tiller with both hands and steadied his frail bark. Every sea threatened to fill his boat. Though he was no seaman, his appreciation of the danger made the thoughts a

safety valve. He held firmly to the rudder and ran before the wind like an arrow sped from a bow.

The lights of the big ship were no longer visible. By the touch of his feet he knew that the oars were firmly secured by being wedged beneath the seats. Fortunately for him, there was no rain. The chances were that the storm would not last longer than daylight. By the flashes of lightning that made the sea visible for a distance, he knew he was alone. No friendly aid rose up out of the water to give hope; only the fierce howl of the wind and the turmoil of the waves were around him. He had no compass to guide him. Thus he drifted in the direction of Alexandria, at the mercy of the elements.

The morning broke cold and gray. The sky was overcast with banks of clouds. Not a cheering ray of sunlight peeped through any blue rift in the heavens. His anxious eyes were bent on the horizon for some succor, some friendly sail that might take him on board. As far as the eye could see the ocean was shipless. All day and all night he drifted thus. His hunger was unappeased, then he bethought him of the food that Florette had placed in his pocket. Never did a morsel of food bring gladder joy to a hungry soul. He did not eat ravenously, because he did not know when help would be at hand. He bethought him of the essence of the peppermint plant. He dropped three drops on the end of his tongue; the coolness of the preparation soothed the irritating effects of thirst.

His thoughts took a peculiar turn. He laughed like a madman, but only the echo of his own voice came back to him. "The irony of fate," he bitterly exclaimed. "Ten days ago I was dressed in purple and fine linen, a pampered darling of fortune, eating with keen relish the luxuries of sunny Italy, surrounded by wine and beauty,

strolling among the wrecks of Roman grandeur. What am I to-day? An outcast, with only this frail shell between me and the gray ooze at the bottom of the sea, my tongue parched with thirst. Mayhap I drift to Calypso's enchanted isle, where my life shall end."

In his haste to reach some harbor of refuge, he rigged a sail by using the outer priestly robe. He placed one of the oars in the hole that once held a mast, and with the cord that bound his cowl about his waist he secured the fastenings. In the joy of his heart he shouted aloud. The stiff breeze filled out this strange sail, and his boat made good headway towards the ancient city of Alexandria.

Another danger came with its brooding horror; his eyes were heavy with sleep, the sleep that would perhaps send him to the bottom of this ocean. He took the cord from his waist, the cord that bound the cowl of his order and concealed the baleful letter, and lashed the tiller firmly to the seat. He took down his gray sail and stretched himself at full length on the bottom of the boat, and knew naught till the rocking of his boat ceased. He opened his eyes to find one of the passengers of the ship that had cast him adrift bending over him in a devotional manner that puzzled him. She was an Italian. In her broken English, by signs and words, she informed him that the ship went down and all on board were lost, with the exception of herself.

The superstition that made him a Jonah when he was on the ship now made him an avenging god to this poor terror-stricken woman whose orisons were demonstrative; her industrious tongue had made him such in the eyes of those who crowded around him. Never did the baleful letter glare with greater intensity. He heard the name of Allah on every side. A squad of Moslem soldiers sur-

rounded the boat. He was too weak to make any resistance. The want of water made him delirious. When reason returned he was lying on the sofest of cushions. He reached forth his hands to touch them. They were silk curtains of the richest material hung all around to deaden the sound of his voice.

Oriental lamps swung from the ceilings and shed a perfumed light on this mass of magnificence. He pushed the curtain aside and beheld successions of Moorish arches and mosaic pavements. The carved pillars that supported the dome were enriched with arabesque. "Am I a puppet of strange dreams, that I see such visions?" He said this as he looked around him in amazement.

"Is this Calypso's fairy isle? Where is the vine-hung cavern and the fountains crystal play? Do these rich curtains hide the panorama from my bewildered sight? Are these her nymphs that flit noiselessly around me?" His senses were disenchanted; these nymphs were only servants to wait upon his pleasure. The fragrant aroma of coffee came like the spiced breezes of Arabia to make the pangs of hunger more real. What were these eastern dainties to one who had suffered from shipwreck?"

In vain he tried to make them understand that he wanted something more substantial than dates and confections. The effort ended in failure. He ate the sweetmeats that they handed to him in silence. The coffee was stimulating; for thus much was he thankful. The softness of the divans and ottomans enticed sleep, and with darkness around him, he sank to rest, dreaming of Florette.

When he awoke refreshed he looked around him for some means of escape. The truth dawned upon him for the first time. He saw the Turkish soldiers walking their

posts with watchful care. They were stationed at intervals of fifty feet. He stole into the great building, yet knew he not its uses. The paved aisles echoed his lonely footsteps. He approached the magnificent altar. Then the horror of the situation dawned upon him: he was in a Turkish mosque. The moslems of the East were to elevate him to the dignity of a god through the superstition of these followers of Mohammed.

He knelt in prayer at the gold railing and cast his eyes upward to the ceiling that towered above with its lofty grandeur, and prayed for deliverance from captivity. The solemn chant of his brothers in Dantima drifted from across the ocean to soften the feeling of loneliness that enthralled his heart. He replied in a more earnest manner than he had ever done before. Again and again the sad sounds floated through the arches to terrify these poor girls, who knew not the cause thereof.

A feeling of irritation took hold of his mind. "Here have I again riveted my chains with a stronger holding. These maidens will make superstition a true belief. Why did I kneel at this unholy chancel?" He said this as he returned to his curtained apartment that was part of the altar, and sat indolently trying to make some plans for his liberation.

Sir Jasper counted not time. The days drifted into months, yet he knew not if a year had rolled around. The thought of the promise that he made Florette came to him like some instrument of torture to make him more anxious to escape. One day there was a commotion outside. He peeped through the stained-glass windows. A palanquin was brought into the mosque, and he was borne away. He knew not the direction, because the curtains were tightly drawn. For days he was conscious of

a rocking movement, with intervals of rest. Then he was conscious that he was being carried on men's shoulders through busy streets, where the sound of many voices and the tramping of many feet informed him that his journey was ended. Again he became an altar adjunct.

This mosque was more gorgeous than the one he had quitted in Alexandria. The Egyptian maidens that were his attendants in the first prison house were replaced by Circassian girls of great beauty. The vessels of the mosque were of solid gold. How his English blood rebelled at the strange faces that came, peeped through the opening in the curtain, and then withdrew. Day after day was this repeated, and yet the end was not in view.

During the hours of his former duress he had diligently mastered the language of Arabia. That now promised him some hope of a speedy escape from his captors. His plans were strengthened by the daily conversations that perfected him in this strange language. They informed him that his destination was Mecca, where the prophet was suspended between Heaven and earth at one side of the altar. A great hope came to him.

He drew from his cowl the precious parchment that the alchemist gave to him. The name of Mecca was transcribed thereon. A new happiness came to his heart. The curiosity to unravel the mystery grew upon him as the distance to the goal of his desires decreased. These beautiful women that had pleasure in serving him were astonished at his fluent mode of speech. While they were not Arabians, yet they, like himself, spoke the language. The noble captive improved with diligence this opportunity to make his escape.

"Callisto," he said with pathetic gravity, "tell to me

the legends of Arabia; tell to me the reason for my imprisonment. Why should I always be obliged to live in these mosques and be attended by women? I never see any men except those that worship in thy temples. Where am I now? By the rocking motion of the palanquin I must be in the interior of the land."

The beautiful slave laughed a soft laugh that showed her regular pearly teeth on both sides of her gums, as she replied: "Thou art in Alexandria still, where thy misfortune cast thee. The journey thou didst take was to enhance the solemnity of the prophet's religion, of which I know little. Thou art the true prophet that was to come out of the West—a greater than Mohammed art thou."

"Callisto, light of my soul, soften thine heart, and lend me thine ears, for it will bring wealth to thee. Thou must know that I am a powerful prince in my own country, and I will make thee free. Thou shalt not be a slave to be sold to whoever will buy. Thou shalt have jewels and fine robes to adorn thy heavenly beauty. Thou shalt command thy servants with a modest grace, and be in thy realm a queen. Allah will crown thee with the wish of thy heart."

She looked up to him naively, and replied as she drew closer to his side: "I would that thou givest me thy love." There was no timidity in her nature. She was unlettered in the art of feminine diplomacy. The wish came directly from her heart, and her perfectly formed mouth was the servant of her will.

His intense love for Florette inspired him to act a hypocritical part. If he could gain his freedom by building false hopes in this young girl's heart, what was that to the bondage of such a life? "Dost thou mean that I

should marry thee, light of mine eyes, to gain my liberty?"

"I know not whereof thou speakest. Marry, marry; what is the meaning of the word? I was sold for the harem, but my beauty belongeth to the prophet, and thus thou hast me as thy attendant."

The thought was abhorrent to his better nature. By her desire she would be to him as a slave of the harem, subject to his carnal desire. If he should escape and return to England with her as such, what would Florette say? He could not abandon her to her fate, because she saved him from a life of misery. Such cowardice were deserving of fagot and fire. "Callisto, I press thee to my heart. Allah, be praised that thou sayest such words. They are the sweetest that ever fell from human lips."

"Nay, thou great prophet, not so loud of speech, for some, even now, might be concealed behind the tapestries. Then would my plans that I have for thy escape make me a victim of the bowstring and a watery grave."

"Allah, forbid that such should be thy fate. I would not have thee risk thy sweet life for my reinstatement to royal favor. Get me but so much as my sword and dagger, and some outlet from this place, and no suspicion will attach to thee, thou harmless dove."

Again she laughed softly. "Knowest thou where thy sword and dagger are? They are in gold-mounted crystal cases, and are as sacred as the little bit of green bed curtain of Mohammed."

She placed her finger to her lips as a token of silence, and darted away. He could hear the curtains move all around him. He followed the movement with caution. This hope that he had builded on this girl's love was to be frustrated by spies. Perish the thought. It was Cal-

listo making the rounds. Thankfully he breathed a prayer for her safety.

As the evening drew on, the shadows grew deeper in the aisles of the great dreary mosque. The place of Mohammedan worship was closed. The perfumed light of a golden lamp filled the interior space with a sickening smell that he detested. His home in England never seemed so far away before this time. Better the letter with its baleful influence and scarecrow notoriety than this uncertain existence. He was reclining on the luxurious divan when Callisto glided to his side, and bending his ear down to her mouth, whispered: "They will take thee hence, and I will see thee no more. Thou hope of my heart, here is a complete suit that my deft fingers have made thee. Thou wilt need all of thy courage. I will put the fittings on thee, but not now."

"Tell me of the danger, that I may be prepared."

"Not now. I will be with thee on the morrow when the first beams of the sun redden the East."

The fear that he would be separated from Callisto made his sleep far from refreshing. Eagerly he watched the first gray streaks of morning creep through the parted curtain. "Callisto, is it thou, my deliverer, come to array me in this outlandish garb? Do thy work, and do it speedily, for I like not the tidings thou gavest to me on yesterday."

While she was trimming the frock of his cowl even to the waist, she began: "There is a legend among the followers of Islam, that a greater than Mohammed will come to judge the people. The dead prophet, whose bones rest at Mecca, was of the earth earthly. The one that is to come will rise out of the sea. Thus the three elements, earth, air, and water, are the emblems that thou seest on

their standards. Thou camest to them in a mysterious way. The open boat that brought thee has been cut up into small pieces for the mosques. The woman that first saw thee was she of the ship that sent thee adrift. It was she that related how the vessel was wrecked, because the punishment of Allah was upon the cruel sailors."

"Would that she had gone down with them ere she gathered these fanatics to the boat. Go on, I would learn the lesson well; keep nothing back."

"Light of my eyes, thou wilt never return to thine own land. They will keep thee a prisoner in the gilded cage of superstition until the breath leaveth thy body; then, like the great prophet, thou wilt be buried at Mecca, and enshrined by the side of the altar."

"And they learn what a cheat that I am, these deluded followers of Islam, what happeneth then, my good girl?"

"These followers of Islam will make pieces of thy body to feed the hungry dogs of Constantinople, or torture thee as only the populace of the East know how to do."

"And I an innocent victim? It seemeth inhuman, Callisto, imprisoned against my will, and then to be tortured for my misfortune. Let us away. I want no more of this Ottoman power."

"A nation, as well as an individual, never forgets or forgives the wrongs that it has committed on innocence. With them, wrong must be right, and right must be wrong, even unto the taking of life."

A groan escaped from his lips. The horror of his existence for the first time dawned on his mind.

She laid the hood of his cowl flat on his shoulders. Over this she drew the showy jacket. His hair she gathered on the top of his head, and she secured it as only a woman knows how to do. She placed the turban on

his coil of curls, the baggy trousers she fastened at the waist with a belt, from which swung a scimitar, with its curved blade that was always getting between his knees. Even this seemed to be an old friend, as he ran his thumb along the razor-like edge. It was heavy enough to deliver a terrible cut. She took from a bag a long, black beard and carefully adjusted same to his chin and cheeks and fastened it back of his ears, that the false hair might not betray him. A pair of slip-shod slippers was placed on his feet.

"Walk thou like this. Give to thy gait an indolent, slightly rolling movement, that thou mayest play thy part so well that none may suspect thee, for on the action of thy bearing depends thy life, and not thine alone, but mine also."

"Take thou these small coins; put them in thy purse, for thou wilt need them to fee the beggars that will delay thy steps if thou give them not alms. The doors of the mosque will open in a few minutes. Conceal thy person behind one of the largest pillars. When two or three enter, walk thou to the altar and prostrate thyself thrice. Each time touch thy forehead to the pavement, and pass out with the devout."

"Where wilt thou be, thou God-given angel, when I am on the streets of this ruined city? For I am as helpless as a child that hath not been weaned." He pressed his deliverer to his breast with all of the ardor of a lover. Not that he loved Florette less. It was a wave of gratitude that swept memory to the winds. He kissed her thrice and moved out into the mosque, as he was directed.

When the doors were opened the waiting faithful prostrated themselves. Intent on their devotion, they did not notice him as he mingled with them. With stately grav-

ity he performed his part. He moved out into the street, where he imitated the slovenliness of Mohammedan life, and followed the figure of a woman whose face was veiled. They kept the same distance between them until they reached the Egyptian part of the city. Then Callisto walked slower until the King's messenger came up with her. The end was not yet, for she made many devious turns, then looked cautiously around and disappeared into an opening in the ruins; he followed. They were together in the darkness.

"We are safe here, sun of my soul; they will never find us, because the ruins are so vast. Good Mohammedans do not come to this part of Alexandria because it is unclean. The dogs of Egyptians, as the followers of Islam call them, dwell here; so take thy rest. The hole that sheltereth us was once a reservoir where water was gathered by the thirsty of other days. Thou seest how dry it is. I will close the opening and light this lamp, that we may see how much space cometh to us."

"How long will we be in this place that sheltereth us now? I am eager to see the end of my journey, Callisto, my soul misgiveth me; thy power of endurance is not sufficient to carry thee over the wastes of sand that lie between me and the goal of my desires."

"If it is by thy side, what mattereth it. Dangers shared with thee are obstacles overcome. Naught have I but thee on earth. I was torn from my home and sold as a slave by my parents to these brutal fanatics, to be shut up in a harem. Death with thee is preferable, and the stars that shine above us see it."

While she was saying this she lighted the lamp and made some coffee that was stimulating. "I give thee not much, for we may be here a month." The food she di-

vided with equal care. "If it fail, then will I secure more; yet I like not the risk."

"Thy wisdom is beyond thy years. Since the opening is closed, how shall we breathe—hast thou thought of this?"

"This is the lair of wild beasts. Foxes and wolves come hither. Dost thou not feel the cool air that flows along the bottom? Through this underground burrow come they thence."

She placed her small hand on his mouth. "Dost thou hear the sound of many voices and the trampling of many feet above us? Keep silent for the moment, until the danger is passed."

The fugitives from fanaticism were in darkness. All around and above them were anxious soldiers, and even the despised Egyptians were paid to find where they were hidden. This was continued for a week. Then all was still once more. Yet ventured they not out, lest spies be hidden in the ruins. By the little rays of sunlight that came through the cracks they had counted thirty sunrises. Then Callisto crept forth into the city disguised as a youth.

Sir Jasper awaited her return with impatience. "How is my destiny bound up in this frail girl that yet seemeth to be a child in years?" He said this with a tenderness that bordered on love; he recalled every look that she bestowed upon him; well he knew that her life was bound up in his by an interdependence, for said he: "What use are these muscles of my arm against a people that smile in my face, and stab me in the back?"

Callisto crept into the opening, and threw her arms around the nobleman's neck. "My soul of life, all is safe, thy escape from the mosque is concealed from the fol-

lowers of Mohammed, who still believe that thou art in the temple; our journey will not be delayed at the gates of the cities through which we will have to pass; to-night we will set forth, to-morrow's sun must find us on the route to Cairo; I have bought two patient donkeys that will rest us as we journey to the East; eat first of thy fill, and refresh thyself, thou must play the part of a deaf Turk."

A day's travel brought them to the great pyramids; an awe stole upon the King's messenger while they passed through this stretch of gigantic ruins; he lifted his eyes to the top, the greatness of ancient Egypt dawned on his vivid imagination, he repeopled the land as it was in the days of the Pharaohs. The nimble animals in the meantime ambled along, swaying their long ears backward and forward in a laborious manner, while their shaven tails industriously brushed the tormenting flies from their unprotected flanks.

They passed unnoticed along the road, because it was the regular highway to the city of Cairo, which place was ahead, a dozen of leagues to the right; it is situated upon a sandy plain where two streams diverge; the low walls were in sight; above them the domes and minarets of the Sultan Tayloon's and the Sultan Hassan's mosques glittered and dazzled in the rays of a tropical sun; the groves of dates, palms, oranges, and citron, made the picture one of beauty, a dream of enchantment. They passed through the gates and took their way to the Turkish quarters of the city.

Callisto's ready wit extricated her companion from a full score of unpleasant situations; he played his part so well that the dear woman at his side sometimes laughed outright; his ready hand went quickly up to his ear when

a stranger addressed him; his painful effort to hear what they were saying to him was so natural that it disarmed suspicion.

The following morning they filed out of the half ruined gate while the sun was rising above the wastes of sand, and followed the traveled road to Suez; though the distance was only twenty-five miles, it took them two days to make the journey. The patient beasts of burden made little headway because the yielding nature of the soil made the undertaking difficult. Both were in a contented frame of mind: they had escaped the dangers that they were now leaving behind them, and every mile they made was a fuller guarantee of safety.

"Soul of my soul, thou playest thy part so well that thou couldst go where no dogs of Christians ever go; but what is their religion to thee, and still less is it to me; thou knowest not the happiness that my heart feeleth because I am with thee to be thy slave, never do thou cast me aside; the strange mission on which thou goest will have wondrous happenings to thee; the strange letter groweth brighter each day that we travel eastward; my poor head knoweth not the meaning, but be thou mine till death."

"Callisto, in our land a man hath but one wife, and the laws of the country make it so; I love a maiden that dwelleth in Dantima, and well she knoweth that my heart is hers; what wouldst thou do in such a situation?"

"I would be thy other wife, it is so written in the Koran, I would love thee with all of my soul; thou wouldst not choose one in preference to the other."

He could not mar the happiness of this beautiful woman by explaining the further details of the law; in his honest heart he had made it as plain as he could; he felt that he

was absolved from any deception; should she return to England with him she would understand more fully the situation; thus they traveled along, happy in each other's company.

It was late in the evening when they reached Suez; they turned off to a clump of dates and palms two miles distant from the city, on the shore of a long and narrow sea; they made no light, but ate their dates and drank a liquor made from the juice of the cocoanut; it was a wise precaution, for the desert Bedouins came even to the walls of Suez; they tethered the donkeys where they could nibble the stunted verdure that grew on the shore of the gulf, and made themselves comfortable for the night.

Sir Jasper could not sleep, his eyes were fixed on the stars above him, he had never seen them twinkle so brightly or seem so near.

The thoughts came so thick and fast that his brain was in a whirl; how he loved the confiding maiden that lay beside him lost in the dreams of a childish sleep; her breathing was soft and regular; secure in his care, she feared no danger; for this reason was he more vigilant; the sword that he carried was of little use, he would have given twenty like it for an English gun with powder and ball; little he thought how near was the fulfillment of his wishes.

A groan from some human being brought him to his feet in an instant; he cared little for the gew-gaw weapon at his belt; he made a stout, heavy staff when he was at Cairo; this he grasped with a firm hand and followed the sound that grew louder as he progressed. Hidden away in the heart of a copse was a rude hut; the denseness of the foliage made it a very secure retreat, the light from a

very small lamp shone through the cracks, a dozen steps forward and he stood by the side of a stranger, whose feeble voice meekly gasped:

"Help! help! for the love of Heaven, help! I am dying, and not the sound of a human voice near to pray for me."

Sir Jasper laid his hand upon the clammy brow where the death dews were gathering, and said: "Peace be with thee, the Lord has heard thy prayer, and I do thee the good offices that thou mayest pass away with thy soul satisfied; first let me examine into thy case, there may yet be hope." He advanced the bronzed lamp, the light fell upon the sick man's face where death had stamped its impress.

The dying man clasped the Turk's hand in his: "Who art thou that speaketh mine own tongue," he whispered, for the gift of speech was even then going from him; "I pray thee, tell me ere I pass away."

"I know not who thou art," the hermit said, "but thy face is a warranty that thou hast an honest heart; listen, I have but a few moments to live, bring me hither the kit that thou seest yonder; be quick, for my breath goeth fast."

When the bundle was placed near to him, the dying man pleaded: "Unbuckle the fastenings and spread the contents before me." Then he handed a bundle of letters to the Turk, and said: "Shouldst thou ere reach dear old England, I charge thee, as a dying man that hath made his peace with the world, that thou wilt deliver this package to the person to whom it is addressed; here is a gold ring of curious design, let me slip it on thy finger that thou mayest not forget; never withdraw it until the letters are delivered, and God will bless thee."

The dying Englishman rallied for a moment, and continued: "There is my gun, it is true and good for a great distance; thou wilt find the powder in this package, and the bullets in this package, keep it as a precious heritage; often hath it saved my life in the wilds of this strange continent with all of its witchcraft. God grant that it may save thee until thou reachest Albion; I was on my return when this sickness came upon me; take thou this spy-glass also, it will serve thee many good turns; the last breath is going, kneel thou and pray for me."

'Twas a solemn sight to see this wanderer drink in every beautiful word of the supplication for mercy and pardon that issued from the lips of the Turk as he reverently knelt by the side of the stranger, whose face lighted with happiness as the prayer ended. "God bless thee, all I own is thine." Then the ominous rattle came to his throat and he was dead.

The morning was well advanced when he returned to the spot where he had left Callisto sleeping. A great fear came to his heart; not only was the maiden missing, but the beasts of burden as well; the tracks were plainly marked in the sand; with great haste he pushed after the robbers, the obstinacy of the donkeys saved the precious girl from capture; the more the robbers belabored these dumb animals, the more they thrust their hoofs in the sand and refused to move.

Rapidly Sir Jasper gained on them; when he was in gunshot one of them raised a spear to murder Callisto, while the others were belaboring the animal she was tied to; he glanced his eye along the bright barrel, a puff, a little cloud of smoke slowly drifted towards the gulf, the savage fell dead, his uplifted spear dropped harmless to the ground; undaunted the other robbers ran towards

him, three spears whistled dangerously near to him, two shots from the small arms stretched two more dead upon the sand, the fourth fled with the speed of an antelope.

"God be praised that thou art unharmed, thou dear soul, a moment more and he had thrust the spear into thee; never again will I leave thee for a moment. While he was making such speech he cut the thongs that hurt her tender flesh, and lifted her from the donkey; when he had done this, she fell at his feet and exclaimed: "Let me be thy servant, thou called of Allah, I am unworthy of thee, it will be happiness enough that I may attend thee."

"Fear not, light of my eyes, 'tis strange, yet will I show that Allah had little to do with it, or the death that it brought to those that would have harmed thee." While he was saying this he was fastening the long thong that was made of hides to the feet of the three dead men; with the aid of the donkeys he dragged them to the shore of the gulf, and tumbled them into a ravine where the first wind storm would bury them.

They rode back to the habitation of the late Englishman, where they were safe from intrusion for a time at least. With his hands he prepared the body for burial, and dug a grave under the floor of the hut; he read the funeral service, and buried the traveler and his kit with reverent silence. He reserved some bullets for the brass-barreled pistols; the compass he kissed thrice, and stroked affectionately the spy-glass that had its case and straps.

"Callisto," he began, "this thing that thou seest, and the thing thou fearest most is harmless, unless thou pourest this dark stuff down its round throat, as thou seest me do now. I place some paper next, and with this stick I

push it thus until it reacheth the powder. Seest thou this round lump of lead that I also send down the barrel, take one in thy hand, touch thou a match to the black grains that I hold on this piece of bark; now it cometh to thee, thou art a quick-witted girl; think not that Allah hath aught to do with this."

He took the telescope from its case, and extended the draws to their full length, drew Callisto to his side, and said: "What seeth thou?" She placed her eye to the little end and turned pale, as she faltered: "The strange thing bringeth the sea to my feet, and the shore, and the trees." He patiently explained to her the uses of the instrument that brought objects nearer, then he also explained to her the compass, and showed her how the needle always pointed to the polar star.

"Star of my life, let us not tarry, but hurry forward; the ruler that sent the robbers will be upon us with his hordes; delay not a moment, thou didst not know it, but the men thou slewest had the letter thou bearest on thy breast also on theirs."

"It is my fate to do the thing that harmeth me most, yet could I not see thee killed for a kingdom of such Bedouins; is not thy life more precious than these? Keep thou the glass to thine eye and tell me when the boat approacheth; we will betimes embark before the boat is crowded."

The package of letters was carefully protected by some thin oil skin; the fastenings were secure; the tightness of the cords that bound it made the bundle diminutive enough to go into a pocket that was next to his body on the right side; when this was done he took the spy-glass and trained it on the Gulf of Suez. Callisto's warning made him anxious; if these Bedouins had been sent by

a ruler why did they try to kill the girl and himself? This question came to his mind for the third time; the sight of the craft that was as yet a long distance away made him feel that the danger had lessened.

"Callisto," he said, "we will time our movements so that we will reach the pier just in time to embark. I like not delays at the landing, too many curious eyes follow us; this acting fills me with anxiety." Then changing the subject, he added, "Here is the Englishman's money; secure it about thy person in a manner that seemeth best to thee, it may serve us a good turn ere the journey is ended; art thou ready? The clumsy bark seemeth but a poor means of travel, but it is better to go forward thus than risk the treacherous sand."

CHAPTER XVI.

CARL HAS A NARROW ESCAPE IN THE KING'S SERVICE.

CARL, the alchemist's son, now captain of one of King Charles' companies of troopers, arrived at the gateway of Dantima; the soldiers had ridden hard, they were tired and hungry, consequently in no mood to bandy words with any one, more especially the gatekeeper who closed the entrance to the town at the time they halted.

"Odds wot what ails thee, Calker? Where is Dame Gretchen? Hast thou forgotten Carl, the alchemist's son?"

A voice from within replied: "Thou art spewed out from the mouth of Dantima these many days, for thou ridest in the cause of King Charles."

"Out upon thee for a seditious traitor," the young captain exclaimed in a loud tone of voice. "Is King Charles not thy ruler? beshrew thee, thou sluggard, thy incivility is great; open in the King's name or I will convey thee to London where such a speech would be richly repaid by the hangman's rope."

A more affable tone of voice came as a reply to this harangue. The words were: "Possess thy soul with patience, thou ungodly youth, thou hast not changed thee one whit since thy boyhood."

While the gatekeeper was mumbling these crusty words, he was swinging the massive gate back on its oiled hinges; the soldiers took possession of the town; never since the oldest inhabitant could remember had Dantima witnessed such a sight. The boy that once stood at the pillory was the courted pet of the royalists, even the roundheads

crowded around to welcome him. The soldiers with their bright uniforms, the jingling of spurs, the rattle of swords had a peculiar charm for the maidens of the burgh; right royally were the troopers entertained; all of the best brewing from Mother Shipley's cellar was drunk, and hilarity ruled the hour.

While his soldiers were being thus entertained their captain sought the old Cathedral of Dantima; he found Father Leonard at his devotions; he was so absorbed in his meditations that he did not at first recognize Carl, who had grown four inches. "Dost thou not know me, father? It is three years since I departed hence; I am Carl, the alchemist's son."

"So many troubles come upon us, my son, that my memory sometimes plays me false. Well do I know thee now, thou hast my blessing; God sent thee and thy men to save the Church from pillage. A company of Cromwell's soldiers are even now on the road, thou wilt not permit them to desecrate this altar that is reverent with age, and thou lovest me do this thing Carl, and Heaven's blessing shall rest upon thee."

"Father, I came to visit Florette and her mother; dwell they still on the cliff, and are they well? By an accident the news of their arrival came to my ears, and I hastened to pay my respects to them; surely thy church and thy religion shall be protected by force of arms, so rest thee contented; I will make the ordering of the battle outside of the walls. Thou didst not tell of they that once dwelt on the Devil's Elbow."

"They have moved to London. Ashton Park is the name of the estate. I am sorry for thy sake, Carl, that thy hard ride is for naught."

"Say not for naught, since my coming brings safety to

thee; and now for a brush with these Covenanters that sing Psalms while they do battle valiantly for the cause of the Lord Protector."

Carl had the advantage. Right well he knew how to select the ground where he could place his troopers on each side of a narrow pass on the road.

A sharp trot swung the line into position. One platoon was faced towards London; the other platoon was faced at right angles to the first platoon. This arrangement gave the troopers a raking fire on the line of march of the roundheads; the videttes were sharply advanced to note the approach of the enemy, while the flanks of Carl's command were protected by squads detailed from his picked men. The young captain was not informed as to the number of the foemen. There might be a squadron or there might be a squad.

The morning was half spent when the videttes rode in and fell into line. The sound of horses' hoofs came to them from the valley below. The commoners were not expecting danger as they pushed up the declivity to receive a deadly volley at a short range that emptied a score of saddles. Carl's clear command to charge was promptly obeyed; each trooper drew his saber, tightened his rein and spurred his horse to a gallop. The onrush was terrible; the momentum of the charge carried King Charles' troopers into the vortex of battle, where the tide of war was thickest. Horses were thrown to the ground and their riders crushed beneath them. Those steeds that were riderless were galloping wildly over the valley; thus Cromwell's soldiers were routed and dispersed.

The dead, wounded and dying were brought into the town; the curses of the covenanters were not loud but

they were deep. Carl drew his men up in line and harangued the citizens thus:

"Hark ye, townsmen of Dantima, should ill befall Father Leonard and his churchly belongings, it will be a sad day for the zealots whose swinging carcasses shall feed the hungry vultures in yonder glen. Remember well what I have said to thee, if thou valuest the safety of Dantima."

The clatter of horses' hoofs died away with the distance. The excited roundheads returned to their firesides to nurse a grudge against those who had once lived on the Devil's Elbow; a grudge that was as deeply seated as of yore. All of the recent misfortunes were coins paid for by the sale of the cottage to the Widow Deycourt and her children.

Carl made good speed of his journey to London. The hope of seeing Florette was a potent factor in the haste that brought the troop to the gates of London ere the moon was three hours high. He turned his command over to his lieutenant and rode to the sweet rest of his quiet home, where a mother's welcome and a warm meal regaled his appetite.

"Mother, knowest thou that Florette is in London?"

"Carl, my son, go not hither. Well thou knowest that Florette can never be thine. She loveth thee as a friend only. Take thy mother's advice and stay away."

The young officer donned his bright uniform and gave extra touches to his cavalry boots; he adjusted the set of his military hat, with its long black plume, while he hummed a minstrel ballad. The fire of love that had smouldered for so long now burst forth with renewed force. As he rode through the manor gate he admired the handsome grounds that surrounded Ashton Park;

while his horse walked slowly along the hedged drives he thought of the cliff and the troubles that came to him there. The change puzzled him. With his mind filled with queries, he raised the bronzed knocker.

He sat with some impatience in the maroon-colored easy chair. Every fibre of his being was vibrating with hope. It seemed that Florette was tardy with her toilet, although scarce five minutes had passed since he knocked. Perhaps he was intruding. Other worries made him restless till he heard the rustle of silk at the door.

"Carl, is it thou, my little playmate? Forgive me for keeping thee waiting. Thou art a soldier now. Bravely thou bearest thy honors. Thou hast grown a hand's breadth taller; thou art much broader across the shoulders. Thy comely soldierly appearance overjoys me. I will call mother to greet thee."

"Nay, do no such thing, thou perverse child. I would have speech with thee first. As thou sayest, I have grown and filled out. The boy thou knewest once is now a man. It was the hard life of a soldier that made me what I am. Florette, thou camest near to breaking my heart when thou fledst from the cliff. Thy note under the rock made life little worth the living."

"Little choice had we. Thou wert lucky to get thus much. King Charles' soldiers gave us little time to say to thee good-bye. We have the warmest corner of our hearts reserved for thee, and may thy advancement be proportionate to thy desire. We are secure here in our rights, and await the decision of Cromwell to make it a finality."

"Florette, art thou as happy here as thou wert at the cliff? It is not so, because thy color is changed; thou art

pale; thou hast been crying. What is it that troubleth thy heart?"

"There is naught that thou canst do for me, Carl. I prefer the cliff with its ghostly horrors to this magnificence. I tell to thee, Carl, there is one that I love; alas! he wandereth afar, yet have I no tidings from him."

"Sayest thou, my playmate, it is the cavalier monk?"

Without heeding his question she said: "The years that creep so slowly by only bring me yearnings that grow with every passing breath. If I could only place the sweet past in the same little niche in my heart, how happy would I be. Alas! how can hope be satisfied?"

With Carl, love was blind. He did not understand the cause of her sorrow, and pressed his suit by pleading: "Florette, I have loved thee with all of the fidelity of a boyish love. Thy presence was happiness to me. Thy absence misery. Time has not chilled the flame that lights my future with hope. May I, dare I expect that thou wilt bless my coming years by bestowing on me thy hand and thy heart?" The modest confusion of his manner was charming.

"Carl, I would not cause thee one pang of sorrow for a diadem. Thy love any woman would feel proud to own. My heart is another's who traveleth in the far desert of Arabia. For three long years has he been absent. Canst thou blame me for the grave doubts that fill my anxious heart?"

The young officer's chin sank upon his breast. He tried in a manly way to hide his agitation that unnerved him as he replied: "Alas! I knew not of this. Thou hast crushed me with the words that make hope a mockery."

"Should he never return, then the love thou askest

shall be thine. This is all of the hope I can give to thee, Carl."

"Then thou biddest me to hope. These be crumbs that fall from love's table; they must feed my starving heart. 'Tis better than desolation."

The Widow Deycourt entered and ended this painful scene. She advanced to the young officer and shook both hands warmly. "How is thy sweet mother, Carl? How proud she must be of thee, her soldier boy. Thou lookest every inch the trooper. I charge thee as thou valuest my friendship, convey thy mother hence, that we may in a small way return to her the kindness we had from her in Dantima."

"It shall be as thou wishest, when more peaceful times shall dawn on our unhappy England. I am so constantly on duty that it giveth me little time to stay within doors. Father still dreameth over his life's work with all of the enthusiasm of youth. Our absence will be to him a misfortune. I must mount and away, for stirring times make quick advancement."

Carl rode to his quarters in barracks, and had ordered one of his men to unsaddle his horse when a page from the King placed a sealed note in his hand and departed. The flush on his face deepened as he read the lines:

"I have good report of thee. Ride to the palace at once."

The young officer lost not a moment of time, but rode at a sharp trot to the King's chambers, where he dismounted and followed a gentleman in waiting, who conducted him into the presence of His Majesty, who looked long and anxiously at the youth, whose military bearing pleased him. "Thou art a youth in years and a soldier

in experience. I will entrust thee with a commission that will try thy wit to the utmost and thy bravery even unto the gates of death. What sayest thou?"

"My duty to my sovereign is not measured by such dangers. My life for it that I will execute the trust."

"Thou hast our gracious permission to be the bearer of despatches that I will place in thy keeping later when we are alone. Canst thou set out with dispatch? Change thy uniform; it were not well to wear such, as thou wouldst be a target for the bullets of the enemy. Upon the expedition of thy charge hangeth the fate of my crown." When he had placed the package in the youth's possession he withdrew, and Carl rode home to make preparation for the journey.

His mother was surprised at the change in her son, for he was disguised. The thought came to her that his commission had been cancelled. He quieted her fears by the explanation that he gave to her, but he told her not of the danger as he kissed her with unusual affection and rode away to the borders of Scotland.

Much depended upon the animal he rode. He patted the fine horse on the neck as he rode along, and said: "Bessie, thou must bear me far and safe. There is danger ahead. Thou art clean-limbed. Thy power of endurance is great. Much will be required of thee." The suit of clothes was genteelly shabby. Neither was it too new nor too old. He studied carefully the writing on the paper that was given to him; the roads he was to take, the places he was to stop for refreshments, the inns whose landlords were royalists, were all jotted down on the paper.

The danger increased as he advanced. He was in the heart of a country where the name of a royalist was de-

tested. Thus far it was an uneventful journey to him. He reached his first stopping place, where he dismounted, threw his rein over his arm and followed a bridle path that led to a comfortable English home whose massiveness astonished him. The thickness of the walls was indicated by the deeply indented windows that were almost concealed by ivy. He entered the grounds by way of a gothic gate and rapped as he was directed.

The smile of a rosy-cheeked maiden greeted him as the door cautiously opened. "Who art thou? and from whence comest thou?" were the words that reassured him. He knew he was at the right place, because the words that she used were understood secret signals between royalists. Seeing her youth he replied:

"Call thy mother that I may have speech with her."

A matronly woman approached and looked fixedly at him. When he gave the sign her manner changed. "Welcome thou art in the name of good King Charles. We are intensely loyal to our sovereign. What comfort thou mayest take in this manor is thy due."

"In the King's name I thank thee. Would that those who say neither yea nor nay to his cause were half so loyal, then would we make stronger headway against the covenanters that make the cause of Cromwell a power to be feared."

"Tell to us how fares the cause of His Majesty. It is full three months since we have had tidings from London. Here we are cut off from the world and surrounded by roundheads that guard the borders with a vigilance that is wonderful. Hearest thou them singing Psalms as they ride to and fro. They are under the command of General Monk, who knoweth not the nature of mercy. He sticketh those that be bearers of despatches (from King

Charles to Glasgow) through and through, as thou wouldst spit a hare. Fear nothing; they have just trotted away for the night. Thou wilt be safe, but to-morrow must not find thee here."

"It paineth me to tell to thee that the cause of King Charles is hopeless unless he hath the aid of some foreign power, but our loyalty must the brighter grow, as our King's star recedes. Some stroke of statecraft may yet tide over the misfortune."

His animal was stabled out in the woods. This precaution was taken for fear of the pickets that came for feed without saying as much as by your lief. By Carl's direction the saddle was not removed from the mare's back. He entered the cheerful room that had been prepared for him with his mind filled with plans for the morrow. He studied closely the strip of paper that had complete direction written on it.

"Bessie," he mentally exclaimed, "I must leave thee behind. The risk is too great. I will need thee later; then thou wilt be fresh when thou bearest me back to London with the papers that His Majesty desireth most."

He dropped into a troubled sleep that ended with dawn, and arose to make his exit. He was preparing to depart when the hostess stood before him.

"Stay! thou goest not without a bite. It is early yet. Thou wilt need something to stay thy stomach; as thou goest on foot abide awee and I will prepare it myself." He waited with some impatience for the food. His fast the night before whetted his appetite and gave him a better humor for the delay.

"I thought so," he said. "I hear these cursed Psalm singers changing guard. I will wager a crown that they

come to this house, and should they try to find me my brave words to the King will end with failure."

His hostess came to him quickly and stammered: "The pity of the thing, and I did pray thee to remain. Thou must play the part of a serving man. Make the change quickly, for they are on us as though they would search the house. Remember, thy name is Peter. Take thou this rope and bring wood that is already cut into the house. Keep thy wits about thee and fear naught."

The tramp of soldiers sounded ominously from the front gallery. The loud knocks on the door made Carl nervous as he hastened to the woodpile and wielded an axe with such skill that even these roundheads were deceived as they watched him from the house. He made a bundle of fagots and fastened it with the stout cord, threw it over his shoulder and entered the room where the madam was remonstrating with the grizzly officer in command, who had no more consideration for a helpless woman than he had for a cow.

"Ho! ho! what have we here. A Royalist in disguise, I'll be sworn. Let me but gaze on thy face." Carl had learned from Nattie the trick. He dropped the lower lip and while the spittle ran from his mouth his face took on an idiotic stare that made this officer laugh outright. The hostess fairly shook with laughter as she exclaimed:

"Peter, they took thee for a Royalist." He answered not a word, but picked his nose and drew the sleeve of his coat across his nose in lieu of a handkerchief, and without paying any further attention to the soldiers he took each fagot at a time and put it in the box by the fire.

Cromwell's soldiers searched the manor from garret

to cellar, yet found they naught suspicious. The officer said:

"It seemeth strange that such things should be told to us. The suspected bearer of despatches was tracked to this place, and yet I find him not."

The owner of the manor spake up and explained: "The man thou seekest is far hence by this time. He rode to the south and hath outwitted thee."

Hurried orders were issued to the command that galloped away in hot pursuit. The madam laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks. Every time she looked at Carl a fresh burst of merriment overpowered her.

"The King needs have no fear of thy ability to carry despatches or anything else. Where learned thou the trick?"

"From Nattie, the son of Widow Deycourt, who dwelt near Dantima. Oft hath it stood the boy a good turn in searching for papers in the old Custom House."

"Thou knowest the family, and thou here with me. Tell me of them; it has been years since they passed from my memory. Nay! nay! I detain thee not; thou shouldst be gone. I wot well where these soldiers were stationed; the soldiers that have ridden away. The road is clear for thee, and the pass in the hills unguarded. Thy name, good youth? ere thou goest from me."

"Carl, the alchemist's son."

"My sister's child," she exclaimed with great fervor. "I am thy aunt and this is thy cousin. Right proud I am of thee. Good care will I take of thy horse while thou art gone. Be sure to come this way when thou returnest. I have much to say to thee." Mother and daughter embraced Carl and led the way to the back entrance where a serving man awaited his coming.

Not a word was spoken as they pursued their way through devious windings until they stood on the soil of Scotland. The reticent man pointed to the road that Carl was to take and disappeared.

"The worst barrier has been passed. Were it not for that grand woman never had I seen this side of the pass. Who may she be? I heard naught of her from my mother's lips."

She informed him that Scottish wit would be his deadliest enemy; that their soldiers were bloodhounds that never quitted the trail until the game was brought to bay. These thoughts nerved his soul to greater effort as he plodded along in the suit of clothes that he had on when he acted so well the part of the idiot. The rough shoes blistered his feet, yet not for one moment did he halt or turn back. Northumberland and the Cheviot Hills were behind him; his destiny was in front of him; the miles were rugged and rough. He bathed his swollen feet in the brawling streams. The farm-houses where he begged for food begrudged him a bowl of oatmeal porridge. He rejoiced that this was the case, because his acting and his disguise were perfect. The farm-houses were situated at shorter intervals. Edinburgh was ahead of him. With a sigh of relief he entered to find the inn of The Thistle.

When he reached the inn he sat down in one of the seats that was severely hard. Evidently my landlord did not encourage idling by placing cushions on the chairs. He was thoroughly tired. Rest on any piece of furniture was a luxury. He noted everything around him. The rubicund visage of the landlord was a study as he stood behind the bar and waited on the thirsty, while the pennies and hapennies dropped into the till. With wonder-

ful regularity he noticed that the eyes of mine host were directed his way more than once, but he (the caterer) was so busy that he had not the time to come from behind his counter.

The proprietor's rough language was not of the choicest. The gestures that accompanied the words were even more violent than the epithets. "Thou vagabond, find thee work and earn thy living like an honest man. Get out of my inn; take thee to the country from whence thou camest. Be off with thee!"

"Thou art mistaken, landlord, I did but come in to rest. I am a gentleman. When my hat is on my head my house is thatched. The papering on the walls of my house is blue, with golden stars for a background; my table is the earth, and thou settest none better; my ale runneth to waste from the mountain streams, and to my house thou comest when thou diest."

"A pert laddie thou art. Thy tongue is as glib as the wag of a dog's tail. A nice gentleman thou art in thy rags and dirt. Hast thou naught better to say, then get out! begone!"

"Thou are not going to throw me out into the street because I am poor? Beshrew thee, man, for thy want of hospitality." Carl gave the royalist sign, yet did he not relax the wagging of his tongue for a moment.

"Angel thou art, indeed," exclaimed the boniface. "The holes in thy coat hide not thy wings; my heart relenteth. Do but split me some wood and thou hast a meal that will tickle thy ribs with fatness. Follow me."

When they had reached the woodpile the landlord's manner changed. He grasped the small hand of Carl in his big fat one, and said: "I knew thee when thou didst enter my inn. The harsh words were but to deceive

those around us that have the eye of a lynx. Hast thou the papers?"

"Yes, but how will I reach the interior of the castle. I am commanded to place these documents in the King's own hands, else they go not out from my possession. Dost blame me for the thinking?"

"All has been arranged for thee, laddie, so fret not thyself."

"I must stand in the presence of the young King without arousing suspicion of the Calvanistic cerberus that makes his reign a mockery. Gain thou me admission to the royal kitchen and the thing is done."

"Thy wit is wondrous. Thou hast the thought that was in my mind. The cook to His Majesty is true to King Charles as thyself, and if thy wit take thee not into the palace then am I a loon."

Carl passed unchallenged into the rear of the castle and then sought the kitchen. He recognized the man he wanted to meet. The royal purveyor ordered the subwaiters here and there as one accustomed to authority. The disguised officer moved over to where this chef was standing and began tasting of every dish within reach of his hands.

"What meanest thou, thou graceless vagabond. Wot ye not that it is for the King. The guards shall belabor thy back for the insolence."

"Your pardon, sirs, I did but tickle my palate with luxuries that make His Grace's stomach a hotbed of misery. No bad grace to thy art. I will e'en see the King and make petition that I may be his royal taster, for very fear that Arminian food and Episcopal pabulum might demoralize His Grace's stomach to the detriment of Presbyterianism."

"Thou art as pert a knave as e're went unhanged. Some good rope is spoiling for the stretching."

"First let me eat in kings' houses, then have thy will and be hanged. How eats a king? and with what grace receives he such toothsome fare?"

"Thou shalt serve him with thy beggarly hands, but not in such a garb. Go to yon room with the door open; there thou wilt find such as thou seest we wear. Make the change quickly and come thou to me."

Carl put on the garb as he was directed and stood before the chef, ready for his turn. With a well-filled tray he entered the magnificent hall where the King was surrounded by his court, although the court was not selected to his liking. The royal personage sat in moody silence and ate little. When the previous course was removed, Carl advanced and placed the dishes in such a position that the unhappy monarch understood the sign, yet it was unintelligible to those who sat watching him.

The King, with pretended anger, exclaimed: "Return this dish; it is cold. I'll have none of it; give it sufficient heat that I may enoy it."

"You Majesty's orders shall be obeyed."

When Carl returned to the chief cook he delivered the message of the King in a jocular manner that had a hidden meaning. This dispenser of royal fare knew that this lad had been partially successful. In a more amiable tone of voice he queried:

"Well, thou malapert; didst thou see a king eat. His appetite is as capricious as the favor of a maiden. And he swore not at thee? Thy star is yet to rise. I'll well besworn thou hast gentle blood in thy veins, for thou showest thy bringing up. Return to him; mayhap this cookery will be more to His Grace's liking."

The most difficult part was yet to be enacted. Carl wished to breathe into the King's ear the password that was known to the two kings and himself. The careful manner in which every movement of this young monarch was guarded puzzled the lad. When he stood by the side of Scotland's ruler, he intentionally dropped one of the dishes that fell to the floor with a crash. While he stooped to pick up the pieces he gave the password so adroitly that the spies seated next to the royal personage did not suspect that a plot was being hatched under their noses.

"Thou negligent varlet," His Highness muttered in anger, "another inch and my costliest silken doublet were ruined. Be thou more careful in the bringing or back thou goest to rural living from whence thou camest. Stay, my good fellow, art thou nimble of foot?"

Carl exhibited extreme embarrassment in his demeanor, as he replied: "Fairly so, your Majesty;" then he looked at the broken bits and continued: "A pretty mess, this; a half crown would not repay the loss, and I had not earned so much in a month."

"Parley not with me, fellow, but do as thou art bid." The King handed the slip of paper to an elderly man with an austere countenance and said: "Seest thou aught that would bring harm to thy cause in this bit of paper?" The missive was returned without comment, then Carl hurried away, using extreme dispatch. In three-quarters of an hour he entered the dining hall breathing hard. Another spy on the unhappy ruler took the answer from the boy's hand, read it carefully, and directed him to the office of state, where he found the King seated at his desk, his thoughts engrossed in the work before him.

On one wing of the secretary was a number of folded documents bearing the great seal of state.

Carl, with intentional awkwardness, caught his foot in a rug and fell forward to his knees, thus he overturned the file nearest to him. With his back to the wardens of Scotland he adroitly slipt the despatches that King Charles had placed in his possession in with the other papers and stood back from His Highness with an abashed air that left nothing to be desired in the way of acting. The King, with great ill-temper, fumed: "Thou varlet! dost expect me to pick them up. Down on thy knees and gather what thou hast dispersed. Then go and get thy discharge, I'll have none such around my person."

The crestfallen servitor withdrew to the cook-room, where he related to the chef the ill-luck that had befallen him. "Ill a day that I came into the palace of the King, for I did naught but stumble and fall down to His Grace's displeasure, and now he hath dismissed me in disgrace. But I have seen a monarch eat. The divine right of kings hath made no difference in the man. He is no better or no worse than myself. If the clay that cometh from the moulder's hands differeth aught from common clay then I know it not."

"Alack! and what hast thou done? Thou hast spoiled the making of as bonny a cook as ever turned a spit. Thy forwardness and wit had stood thee in hand for jester of the court, and make our good King laugh, that his digestion may be improved. Worry maketh every dainty that I prepare a befoulment to his stomach."

"Give me my rags that I may go hence. The hot air of diplomacy suiteth not the contentment that money cannot buy. Thou hast my thanks, good chef. The mountain air seemeth more to my taste." Saying which he moved to the apartment where he put on his old suit and

returned to the inn to relate the incidents as they occurred.

"Ah, laddie, I see thy success in thine eyes. The bonniest meal in all Scotland shall be thine. The softest bed in the inn shall rest thy body until the return despatches are in thy possession. Then thou must be off, and God's care shall see thee safely to the end of thy journey."

"Thy good wishes shall make my journey hence a promise of success. Thou knowest it not, yet have four men been spitted like hares. God save the mark that I should be the fifth."

"Right well I ken that thou speakest the truth. Go to thy bed and sleep as one whose conscience hath not the sting of wrong-doing. I will arouse thee betimes that thou mayest have a bonny start."

Carl was conducted to his room by one of the servants. The face of this man did not bring assurance that all was right. His broad Scottish dialect smacked of the rankest enmity to the House of Stuarts, therefore his sleep was disturbed by the suspicions that crowded upon his brain. The middle watch of the night had come and gone. He was certain that some one was moving in the wide dark hall. The darkness made it impossible for him to see or be seen. He crept from the covering and made his way to the corner where his clothes were. Some force appeared to retain a hold on the garments. Perhaps they were held fast by rounds of the high-back old-fashioned chair. From the pocket of that part of his trousers that was in his hand he drew his keen-bladed knife and cut at random at the obstacle that proved to be a man's hand. A howl of pain from the intruder, a hurried exit from the house and all was still again.

If the landlord had heard the noise he passed the inci-

dent by as he would some drunken brawl. He did not mention the subject to the young man as he came lightly up to the bed and aroused the sleeper. It was the fourth hour in the morning. The host whispered: "Arouse thee, laddie, 'tis time for thee to be on thy journey. Here is the package that thou art to deliver to good King Charles. Here is the bonniest brace of pistols that ever burned powder. Thou wilt need them. Here is a ring that His Majesty sent thee as a remembrance for thy kindly act. Dress quickly and go."

"Good-bye, thou of the sign of The Thistle. I shall not forget thee quickly. If I do then perish my name." As he said this he moved rapidly through the streets out into the country and bore well to the westward, because it was a road that was least traveled. The stars sparkled in their cold brightness; the frosty air gave a speedier movement to his legs; thus with a steady, swinging gait he was miles away from Edinburgh ere the sun was well up in the sky.

The ravines and hilly ruggedness of the route were chances in his favor. Thus far he had met no traveler, coming or going. His thoughts were his happiest companions. He pictured to his mind the prestige the adventure would give to him in the opinion of Florette. The ring that King James sent him was crowned with the royal coat of arms. In his joy he kissed the bauble that would advance him in the court of King Charles, and also advance his wooing at Ashton Park. With these happy hopes crowding his brain he sped swiftly along. Now and then the faintest sounds of footsteps came to his ears.

He halted and listened. Perhaps the sound was the echo of his footsteps. He moved forward a bit. Again

he heard the ominous warning. He crept into a hollow at one side of the highway and waited for the travelers to come up. He grasped firmly his pistols and moved farther into the vast lonely forest, where he waited patiently for the day to close. Fortunately the days were at their shortest and night drew on again. He pulled off his shoes. This was a wise precaution; although the hard road hurt his feet, it gave him the advantage that he appreciated. He stuffed some of his rags into the bottom of his stockings and pushed forward.

Ten leagues had been placed behind him. The most dangerous part of his trip was ahead of him. With his sense of sight and hearing painfully acute he crept to the protection of a sheltering rock. The sound of voices were not a score of paces from him. He redoubled his precaution and followed the same direction until the red glare of fire was reflected from the pines and spruces on the mountain side. He glided cautiously forward and saw two pickets seated around a small blaze that the dead limbs of the forest furnished for the gathering. Their guns were leaning against a tree at some distance from them. The words they spoke made him shiver. With all of the secrecy of the landlord and his acting (Carl's acting) the interchange of despatches was known to the Roundheads. One of the pickets said:

"Si, the wit of this young heathen royalist is a seven days' wonder. He hath outwitted the craftiest man in Scotland and now returneth to London with the papers that General Monk must take from this messenger. The guards have been stationed thickly along the route. I will well be sworn that he escapeth us not this time."

Carl was within ten feet of the soldiers. He aimed a steady aim. A flame leapt from the muzzle of his pistol;

a bullet crashed into the brain of one of them. He placed the barrel of the other pistol to the forehead of the other soldier and said in a low, stern tone of voice: "Give me the password or thou diest." The suddenness of the attack wrenched the word from the soldier's mouth ere he bethought him to give a false password. "Now, tell me thy name and the number of thy troop or it goeth ill with thee. Give me the name of thy captain."

Carl was loth to kill this man, but his life and safety were the price of liberty, and the second soldier lay dead at his feet.

Carl reloaded the pistols and drew from the dead man his uniform. The change was quickly made. Equipped as a soldier of Cromwell he strode to the highway and walked briskly for the space of three hours. He was halted eight times, but the word was given and he passed onwards to Northumberland. He was anxious to reach his cousin's house ere the death of the two pickets would be known. When daylight dawned he was crossing the line that divided England from Scotland.

He turned into the long avenue that led to his aunt's house and was on to an officer of Cromwell ere he could retreat. A stern command to halt rang out on the crisp morning air. The officer seeing his uniform, said: "What command dost thou belong to?"

Carl touched his hat just as the roundhead soldiers did, and replied: "Captain Moulton's, sir."

"Where are they?"

"On the other side of the border."

"It is well thou art here. I have unearthed a nest of treason that harmeth the Lord Protector more than I can tell thee. Follow me. The number on thy hat is 823."

When they came into the house Carl perceived his

aunt and her daughter were bound hand and foot. They were tied to the massive furniture.

"Remain here until thou art relieved. I will not be long absent." This the officer said as he rode away, followed by the sentinel.

When they were out of sight Carl drew his knife across the cords that bound them. While he was doing this he exclaimed:

"Knowest thou not Peter. Give me my uniform quickly. Order my horse at once, we have not a moment to lose. Have thy horses also saddled; no time for explanation or thanks. Pick thy best and mount thy fleetest steeds, for by my faith, thou wilt need them."

The change was speedily made. Without taking even their jewels, the ladies accompanied by Carl rode at a break-neck speed until a safe distance was reached. Then they slackened rein while Carl related the events that happened in as brief a manner as possible. The young officer's ears, which were accustomed to danger, heard a sound in his rear that startled him. "We are pursued," he exclaimed, with some nervousness. "Spur thy steeds to the full. Let them not gain upon us. It were a pity to be captured now, with the goal almost within sight."

"Knowest thou, Carl, who that stern officer is? It is General Monk. If we fall into his hands we can expect no mercy."

"Carl, my animal giveth out. He hath not breath enough to carry me a league. Go thou on and leave mother and myself to our fate. I know that thou bearest despatches to the King. What are the lives of two women to the importance of thy mission?"

"Say not so, my fair cousin; dismount thee quickly and I will bear thee behind me. I am unworthy the name of

man should I forsake thee now." The time they lost was fatal. They could hear the clatter of cavalry draw nearer. "There are a round four score of General Monk's troopers behind us. Take courage, we will soon be with our own."

"Not so, Carl, we have twenty leagues to ride ere we will be saved. This devil knoweth not fear, and his is a will of iron that cannot be bended. Ride thou ahead and we will make such speed as we may."

While they were yet speaking the head of the column swung around the turn of the highway and came on with a tremendous gallop.

"We are lost," the fugitives exclaimed in a breath. "Seest thou the dust ahead of us? Ride with a firm seat into the advancing column. They may give way," shouted Carl to his companions as they spurred their jaded horses forward.

Carl clenched his teeth and gazed gloomily at the troopers in front of him. Then he gave a great shout and waved his hat. "Take these despatches; if I should fall, deliver them to King Charles. That is my troop. Go to the rear for I will give battle."

Another moment and the young captain was among his soldiers. He wheeled his mare. His voice rang out like the notes of a clarion: "Follow me; General Monk is before us, dishonor behind us; down with the enemies of the King!"

A wild yell answered this appeal. The ground trembled as the approaching squadrons came together with a dreadful shock. The flashing of swords, the pistol shots, the hand-to-hand combats, the groans of the dying, the riderless steeds, the cleft skulls made a ghastly picture of war. The impetuous charge of the cavaliers dismayed

the enemy. The fight was ended, the pursuers became the pursued. The recall was sounded. Carl, at the head of his troops, was animated and joyous as he asked:

"By what good fortune didst thou arrive in the nick of time. Another mile and I would have been in the hands of that fanatic that thinketh no more of burning one than thou wouldst think of spitting a hare."

"It was by order of the King, my captain. Thy fame is made. The favor of royalty is not to be refused, although our cause goeth to defeat with a hasty speed that seemeth untimely."

"Take thou the troop to the barracks. I will give attention to these helpless females that came under the dire displeasure of General Monk because of their loyalty to King Charles."

Turning to his newly found relatives, he said: "Hast thou friends in this great city, I will take thee to them; and if thou hast none then thou wilt be welcome to such as we have; poor though it be, thou art welcome."

Carl placed his aunt and cousin in the humble dwelling of the alchemist, nor waited to see the welcome they received. A page from the court came hastily to him, and said: "The King desireth thy presence at once. Lose no time."

Carl answered: "It were unseemly that I should appear before His Majesty begrimed with the dust and smoke of battle. Wait thee a time with patience, and I will make such preparation as seemeth best."

"Tut! tut! stand not on such trifles. King Charles will ne'er see thy uniform. A troubled brain is not over punctilious when such results are at stake. Follow me by the near way."

He followed the page, entered the palace, and stood

before His Grace, who made bold to say: "Well, my young cavalier, hast thou won our royal good will by the charm of success?"

"And it please Your Majesty, these despatches be my answer. This ring that hath the coat of arms engraven thereon was my reward for the little that I have done."

"God wot but thou art a comely lad. No fortune is too good for thee, since thy bravery put to shame the deeds of older heads. I am King only in name. The laws of Parliament have robbed me of a sovereign's right. The pittance that is doled out to me would not repay the smallest part of thy service. Thus does a Stuart reward the brave." After the speech the King placed the emblazoned ring upon Carl's first finger and dismissed him.

The proud youth hurried to his mother to tell of his good fortune. When he had kissed her a dozen of times he joyously exclaimed: "Rejoice with me, thou idol of my heart; see the royal rings that honor me. In honoring me they honor thee. Ne'er did I expect to see thee again."

Looking around the room the alchemist's son inquired: "Where be the ones that I brought hither? I see them not; had they not assisted me, my mission would have ended in failure."

"They sought lodgings elsewhere. How inscrutable are the ways of destiny, my son. There are those that forge the two-edged sword blade that destroyeth the maker thereof."

"What is the meaning of thy speech, my mother; those that I brought here are penniless; how could they secure lodgings?"

"My son, I cannot tell thee now. Destiny must weave

its own loom. Family troubles that have been buried for years are the prices thou dost pay for thy civility. Say no more until events develop."

These sayings went to the heart of Carl, yet asked he no further questions. He noted the pallor on the face of his mother. Then the thought came to him that the strangers were homeless. For this reason he spoke thus: "Where dwell they? I must hand them some gold sovereigns that they may not want for something to eat."

"Promise me that thou wilt not see them again." Carl would have questioned her further were it not for an unexpected interruption. A young girl came to his side and said: "Art thou Carl, the alchemist's son? If thou art, follow me to thy aunt's, who would have speech with thee."

"Thou art fatigued, little one; mount thee behind me and we will be there ere thou canst count a hundred." By direction of the child he reached the cottage that was severe in its simplicity. The surroundings indicated a lack of home comfort that was apparent. He dismounted, helped the child to dismount and entered. His astonishment was great when he stood before an aged woman who shrilly piped: "Art thou Carl, the alchemist's son, and are thy parents living in London? Thy fame reached my ears even in this remote corner of the city. I would see thy father, for he is a just man, and doeth that which is right. Neither careth he for any man's opinion. Tell me where thou dwellest that I may visit thee and thine."

"The child knoweth right well the place where we abide. She will show thee the way with a right good grace. I ken that mother will be glad to meet thee after the lapse of so many years."

"I ken not that which thou sayest is true, my nephew.

At least I will be near to thee that I may use thy father's knowledge; for I have sore need of the chemist's skill to the betterment of my reason."

"I know not whereof thou speakest, but come as thou wilt thou shalt be welcome." Having closed the interview he rode leisurely home with his brain filled with the strangeness of existence. When he met his mother he gave her a description of his visit in this wise: "I have found for thee another sister. Such is the price of fame, as thou seest. She did not know that thou hadst moved to London. A frown wrinkled her brow at the mention of thy name. She hath a sour look that sat illy perched upon my good graces."

"My son, thou gathereth dead men's bones; thou bringeth back the unhappy past for the undoing of us all. Thou shalt know later. Go thy way while destiny weaveth on her loom. I moved to Dantima to get away from her. I fear her and her influence for evil."

Carl remained silent after this partial explanation. The paleness of his mother's face silenced the queries that were on his lips. There was a tender yearning expression on her countenance as she gazed wistfully at him which smote him sharply. For this reason he returned to barracks filled with doubts as to the general fitness of results to the end to be obtained.

His newly found aunt lost not a moment, but placed her wraps around her, for the air was chilly. Her blood was thin and old, yet not old enough to conquer the revenge that she had nursed for years. She knew she would not be welcome, yet she intruded, because a thought had taken possession of her mind. Little attention she paid to the slights that she received from Carl's mother. Her time was spent with the alchemist in the

little back room that he used as a laboratory. She did not stay with the family, but rented a house that was in the neighborhood.

She was fascinated with the adroitness of this patient chemist, who could make every substance but the precious metals. For a fortnight she frequented the cottage; growing more bold, she made haste to place in the chemist's hands a glass box, yet told she him not the nature of the contents.

"My brother, tell to me, is there poison in this substance? For a life dependeth on thy answer." The chemist knowing naught of the nature of the trouble, answered:

"My sister, from whence obtained thou this?"

"A noted leech gave it to me. I have had it in my possession for these many years. The savant that gave it to me is dead. I shall note what thou doest with all care; for the love thou bearest for thy mother be truthful in this thing, and God will bless thee."

Her deep-set eyes glared fixedly at every movement of this learned man, who used his reagents with such skill that he reached a result that startled him. In his wonderment he turned to her and said: "There is arsenic enough in this substance to kill a company of Cromwell's troopers."

"Hadst thou said King Charles' troopers, thou hadst spoken properly." A groan escaped from her thin, colorless lips as the words of the chemist came home to her heart. She moaned: "'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' so sayeth the holy writ." Without so much as a parting word or thanks for the service performed, she departed as quickly as she came. 'Twas not the want

of politeness that hastened her footsteps, but a desire to do Carl a service.

She directed her way to the barracks, where she found her nephew surrounded by his men. He was directing them while they polished the brass buckles of their belts and brightened the steel of their blades. He advanced to where she was standing and addressed her thus: "Something serious has happened. I pray thee to tell me quickly, that I may know at once."

"It is to save thee from danger that I journeyed hither. List to the words of caution from my lips. Remain thou in thy quarters. The onslaught that thou madest on General Monk is likely to bring thee trouble. Two spies came to my home, all the way from the border. They with others seek to trap thee. Now, thou knowest my errand. Again I warn thee to be wary. If thou goest out have thy soldiers with thee. Nay, laugh not, Carl, the danger is real enough." Having thus delivered herself of the information she departed to her home.

"Humiliated pride is stronger than the walls of London," he said. His good resolution melted before the thoughtlessness of youth. He, fearing naught, saddled his steed and rode to Ashton Park. He could not have gone to a more dangerous locality, because it was outside the walls of the city and in the direction of Northumberland. With a cheery good day to the gatekeeper of the park he passed on to the mansion. He did not note the scowl on the porter's face, because his heart was filled with love for Florette.

Alas for the fickleness of love. Florette, while she had not forgotten the King's messenger, yet was she dallying with a feeling that was dangerous. The rapid advancement of Carl, the military dash of his bearing, together

with the flight of time, weakened the flame that distance was gradually smothering. Thus matters stood at this time.

When he bade them good night, they invited him to remain and ride back in the morning, but he gently pleaded a sense of duty. With a light heart he cantered up the road to London, heedless of the danger that followed him in the shape of a two-wheeled cart that kept within easy reach of the horseman. When the darker streets of the city were reached, a hand grasped his bridle bit with such force that it threw his mare on her haunches. A blow on the head rendered the rider insensible. When his senses returned he was lying on the bottom of a jolting cart. His mouth was securely bandaged, that he might make no outcry. There was straw above him, enough to conceal his person from those that might pass the cart on the highway.

The halts were few. The stout horses that were harnessed tandem were given water and feed. Thus the long, rough hours passed with Carl, who was as helpless as an infant. The vehicle came to an abrupt stop with a suddenness that jammed his head against the tailboard. He was lifted out as if he were a bag of meal, and transferred to the ivy-covered cottage of his other aunt; the cottage upon which the humiliated general had vented all of the sanctimonious hatred that had a thousand devils in every graven image.

The gag was removed from his mouth, his cramped limbs were freed from the bonds that stopped his circulation. With a soldier on each side, he was conducted to a secluded part of the forest situated back of the cottage, where General Monk established his camp. Horses were picketed around, and the carbines of the troopers were

slung to their saddle bows. He passed several groups of these and stood in the presence of the general, who was seated on a log. His features were sharply drawn. The look that was in his eyes boded little good to the prisoner. This made Carl more defiant as he looked steadfastly at his judge, who was perhaps to be his executioner. Carl exclaimed in a firm tone of voice:

"'Twas a cowardly thing to do, and still more cowardly done. If 'twas according to thy order, then a blush of shame should mantle thy cheeks, thou iron-hearted man, that hath no shade of pity in thy soul."

If the general heeded this tirade his features never betrayed an emotion as he sternly said: "Prisoner, stand forth, thou art accused of bearing despatches to the King of Scotland, thou art accused of bearing despatches from the King of Scotland to ungodly King Charles, what hath thou to say of thyself. Remember, thy life is the forfeit thou payest for thy silence, so speak out that it may go well with thee."

"Am I one, thinkest thou, that would be likely to betray a trust? If thou even thinkest so much, then will I hang my head in shame. I wot not why thou shouldst be guardian of the border; thou art a usurper and an outlaw against the lawful authority of good King Charles."

"Make thee more civil speech, thou son of Belzebub, or thou shalt have a strap upon thy bare back delivered by one who knoweth right well how to lay the blows thereon." Then he continued: "Whom didst thou receive assistance from in the godly city of Edinburgh? Didst thou deliver the package to the King in person or through a third party? If so, who was this third party? Seest thou yon preparation? It meaneth much for thee.

Yet the thoughtlessness of thy youth pleadeth for mercy, which thou shalt have if thou wilt disclose what is in thy mind; then thou goest thy way to London, undisturbed; thou art a bonny youth, and wise beyond thy years, though thou fightest in an ungodly cause."

"Thinkest thou that a trust like that would be betrayed? then would I be a traitor to my King. Do with me as thou pleaseth; I am helpless and in thy power. To thee and all the world my lips are sealed."

"I will give thee another day that wisdom may dictate to thee what thou shouldst do on the morrow. Confine him in yon treasonable pile, place thou a score of sentinels about the house that he may not escape, for he hath the daring of a freebooter and the cunning of a fox, and, hark ye, should he be gone on the morrow, make thy prayers, for thy stay on earth will be short."

He sat in his room and could hear the psalm-singers as they paced about his prisor with measured tread. He could hear them as they changed their reliefs; the thought of the morrow made his soul heavy; the bright dreams that made his marriage with Florette a certainty vanished in the gloom of the present. He was keenly alive to the situation. A touch on his shoulder made him spring to his feet; the hand of a woman led him whither he knew not; he was content to follow where hope gently led the way.

It was so dark that he could not perceive an object in the apartment. With difficulty he squeezed through a narrow opening; then he walked sidewise for some distance until he descended a flight of steps, where a tallow dip was burning. By its light he recognized his aunt and cousin, the ones he rescued from the clutches of General Monk.

"God bless thee for this, thou angels of deliverance, how is it that I find thee here, surrounded by danger, when thou shouldst be in London?"

"Seek not to know what is beyond thy years. Thy mother gave me but a sorry welcome, as I had not that which would purchase bread. We returned to find the house intact and Peter in charge. As thou seest, the walls are hollow and filled with secret passages. It is to this fact that thou owest thy life. We are in the bowels of the earth and safer than we would be in London. There is an underground way that leadeth to the thicket beyond; there thou wilt be safe from pursuit, for only hares find lodgment there. But hurry not hence for a week, if thou valuest thy liberty."

"Verily was I a fool, else had I not been in such a stress. By the success that crowned my efforts, found I another aunt that I knew naught of, who told me of the danger, and I repaid her kindness by being an ass."

"Of which aunt speaketh thou? The one that readeth her Bible, and yet hath more rancor in her heart than a deadly serpent? I would that she were dead, for her tongue is tipped with the gall of bitterness. She continually repeateth, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' Oh! Carl, she is a dreadful woman that reapeth where she hath not sown. A judgment must come to her for the evil she hath wrought."

"I knew naught of her. She came to my father with a glass box wherein was a substance that he, with rare skill, analyzed. It proved to be arsenic, a most deadly poison. She warned me of the danger from my border foes. As thou seest, I am again thy guest. Thanks be to God, it is so, for yon barbarian had a stake and fagots ready for my burning, and instruments of torture that would force the secret of my adventure from me."

"There is trouble ahead for us all since this woman lives. I marvel that thy father humored her in this, since he knoweth who she is."

"Hast thou aught to eat? My ride under the straw in the cart hath jolted an appetite into my stomach that a plowman would envy."

"It is cold food that I give to thee, Carl. We dare not make a fire, for such would betray us. I charge thee to go not hence for one week. The soldiers do scour the country for thee. Peter will tell thee when the danger is passed. When thou goest, we will go. We have secured our valuables and will be dependent on no one."

"It seemeth to me," Carl replied, " that thou couldst find shelter at the Widow Deycourt's. She liveth at Ashton Park and hath ample means. A gentler soul ne'er lived. Right royal will be thy welcome."

"Where is the duchess that formerly owned the estate? It has been years since I had tidings of her."

"She fled to France. She is living in a chateau near Paris. She had no title to the estate. Through the favoritism of King Charles was she sustained."

"Sayest thou so. This dampness affecteth me sorely. Stay thou with Ella until my return. I will make report to thee of the rage of General Monk. When he findeth thou hast gone he will burn the cottage down. But fear not, the walls are thick. The secret passageways will not be discovered, because they are too deeply imbedded in the walls."

A week passed by, yet were they prisoners in their subterranean retreat; neither was the mansion burned. Peter reported that the Roundheads had been recalled and were on the other side of the border.

When darkness was well advanced the little cavalcade journeyed to London, where they separated.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE KING'S MESSENGER SEEKING PETRA—A FIGHT WITH THE BEDOUINS.

SIR JASPER moved from the grove to the gulf beach, thence along the shore line to the broad, flat-bottomed boat. He was the first to embark. When his animals were on the ship he again became the deaf mute, and Callisto was a beardless youth. The noisy, jostling crowd hastened to the landing. When the boat was filled the craft pushed from shore, leaving a howling throng that waited for the return trip with impatience.

The disguised travelers stood by the side of the guards, which consisted of a low railing that enclosed the deck. While Sir Jasper was watching the sailors hoist the mutton-shaped sail, Callisto was watching the shore.

She pulled the sleeve of her companion's Turkish jacket, and pointed to land. A hundred dark forms encircled the oasis. They glided from bush to tree with the stealthiness of jackals. The distance from shore made them look like a nest of black ants that had been disturbed. Then the picture grew so dim that they could no longer perceive objects. As they were under observation, he made signs with his fingers while the voyagers looked on with amused interest.

"Callisto," he said in a whisper, that was made more with the lips than with his breath. "I should have taken thy advice and killed them all. I can understand the hatred of these fanatics, because they are fatalists. The Mohammedan religion promiseth eternal bliss to those

that fall in the faith. I fear me much they will pursue us when we least expect it."

"Have no fears, thou heart of my heart. I see by the sun that we are traveling away from the direction they took. We are nearing Yembo, which thou seest in the distance." She fixed her eyes on a bird that sailed majestically over their heads. "Seest thou yon messenger of the sky? It circleth closer at every round. What can it mean?"

"It meaneth misfortune for me, thou faithful one. Would that I could strangle the ill-fated thing ere it alights on my shoulder. It belongeth to the cursed letter." When he had ended the conversation he drew nearer to the people that crowded the long and narrow deck. He tried this ruse in hopes that he might bring confusion to the soaring bird. Not for an instant did it waver, as it alighted with a ruffled flutter on the nobleman's shoulder. He stroked the satin smoothness of its plumage, until the bird uttered a weird note and circled upwards till it was a dark point in the sky.

"Didst thou note the direction? It flew towards Mecca." She said this with an awed tone of voice that she tried to conceal from Sir Jasper. When they reached the little port that nestled on the gulf, the donkeys received the attention that royalty would be proud to receive. A carpet of many colors was spread for them to walk upon. As the traveler and his companion passed across the bow of the boat to the landing place, the people prostrated themselves in two rows with their foreheads to the sand. The King's messenger could have kicked them from his pathway as so much superstitious rubbish.

"Callisto," he said, "use thy wits, for we want no more

of the past. Bethink thee of some expediency that will get us away from this hole of a town."

"Shall I tell to these Mohammedans that thou art a prophet of old that visiteth the tomb of Allah's chosen? For in this deception lies our safety now, and thou, light of my eyes, shalt go on thy way unmolested."

"Tell them anything, for time presses me sorely, and the goal is far from this cursed spot."

With a wave of her hand she directed their attention to herself, and in a clear voice she shouted: "Allah is God. He speaketh by the mouth of his servant. Who is greater than Allah? His servant speaketh thus: 'His prophet shall visit in peace the tomb of Mohammed, the beloved of Islam. Whoso layeth hands on him shall be accursed. Whoso layeth hands upon his servant shall also be accursed.' Allah hath spoken, hear ye his word."

The religious fervor gave place to respectful attention as they entered the unhealthy city where filth and uncleanliness was poisoning the air. When the two travelers were alone and secure from interruption, he said to her: "Heaven sent thee to me, thou treasure that gold cannot rob me of. I had been in a sorry plight with these fanatics but for thy ready wit."

"Light of my eyes," she replied, " let me instruct thee further. Thou must know that a prophet should have an austere bearing. This thou hast not. Gaze thou heavenward with thine eyes fixed on space. Should they seek speech with thee, still meditate, and notice them not, for familiarity with the thing we worship breedeth contempt. For this reason a prophet hath little honor in his own country."

"Thy words are words of wisdom as they that come from the lips of a babe. Let me embrace thee and place

the kiss of love on thy brow, whose sense shameth the little that God gave to me."

When they walked forth at the evening hour, the faithful heard the cry of "Allah il Allah" from the city gate. It was the hour of prayer. Callisto's advice was strictly followed. It was well that she had thus admonished him, because a fellah, who was a skeptic, made light of his pretentions. The former reverence gave place to scowling looks. "Callisto, thy charm from danger worketh not a benefit. Here is one who hath sense above his religion. I could shake him by the hand for the boldness of his speech. Yet must we do something or we are lost. Decide thou quickly, thou love of my heart."

"To the mosque; at once prostrate thy person as thou hast done at former altars. The letter on thy breast wilt save thee."

They entered alone. The crowd of worshipers fell back until the so-called prophet and his servant had passed up the aisle. Callisto knelt as became a servant of Allah. He advanced and prostrated his body thrice before the shrine and disclosed for a moment the burning letter that cast a weird light upon the koran as it lay (imbedded on a cushion of satin) upon the altar. The watchful brothers at Dantima chanted louder than was their wont. The rich harmony rolled in a continuous stream through the temple. His voice answered the strains, and all was still again.

The effect on the multitude was wonderful. As the faithful passed out the turbans that bound their heads were removed and spread on the sand, that his feet might not touch such a vulgar thing as the soil of the earth. The one who was a skeptic was taken without the walls, where the bastinado cured his unbelief. When they were

in their quarters he embraced the girl and said: "If it is the will of this people that I be a follower of Islam, who shall say me nay. Thy good graces come as a benediction that maketh it so. What! thou weepest, my good girl? Nay, this must not be; let me wipe the tears from thy eyes, and thou wilt tell me as we are seated 'neath this giant palm."

"The moon cannot look upon the sun's bright face and live. Something here tells me that thou art more than thou seemest. Thou hast not explained to me this western mystery that cometh from afar. It is as the music from Heaven, and I know not what thou sayest in thy prayer that causeth the mystery to cease."

He cast his eyes far o'er the sandy desolation. His thoughts were in Dantima. How many unanswered questions came to him then. Florette, the idol of his love, was perhaps watching and waiting for her wandering lover. Perhaps someone more worthy of her affection had claimed her hand in marriage, and thus the years had mocked him with their mellowness.

"Callisto," he said, "thou hast asked me a question that I cannot answer. In my meditations I ask myself what mysterious power reacheth across the ocean with lightning pulsations; what flaming torch lighteth with unearthly glow this baleful letter; what sound waves span oceans and continents to fill an Arabian mosque with soft and weird music. It is this that brings me hither. We will know when our journey is ended." His head was inclined forward. Unconsciously he gazed down upon the upturned face that was waiting for an answer. Yet spake he naught to this terror-stricken maid.

He brushed back from her forehead the short curling locks, and still the answer came not. "Poor child," he

exclaimed, "thou wilt wait long for me to tell to thee that which I do not know. What mattereth it since I love thee and thou lovest me." Then while the stars beamed kindly upon them, he related the events in detail. The events that made him a wanderer on earth.

"I will trust thee, thou sun of my existence," she said, "yet something strangely moveth me to think that thou wilt be torn from me. Should this be, my soul will wander back to claim its own. I will be with thee always. I will be with thee in every corner of thy life. Thy heaven shall be Callisto's heaven. Forever thou shalt be mine."

"This is the sacred hour of meditation. To-morrow, ere the sun be risen we will be on our journey. The way is long, with naught but the glare of the sand to blind our eyes, and our tongues will be parched with thirst. Thinkest thou, my loved one, thou canst bear up with all of these hardships? We have yet one hundred and forty-seven miles to traverse ere Medina is reached; what sayest thou, Callisto?"

"Be not discouraged. Allah hath provided for thee. Green spots are here and there where fresh, pure water is to be had. Where the grateful shade softeneth the sun's red glare. It were well that we should buy another beast of burden, that the skins of water may be plentiful. Other food that we will need should also be added to our store."

"Thou hast not answered me, Callisto; canst thou stand the fatigue of the journey? Thou art a weak woman, whose hardihood hath not been tried. Bethink thee of the dangers and privations that will attend thy going?"

"What would my fate be shouldst thou leave me in this vile country? The harem of some rich Turk would

be to me a lifelong prison. Thou canst not say me nay. Upon me dependeth thy success. Thou hast the strange eye that seeth afar; thou hast the little thing that telleth thee the way; thou hast the long iron that belcheth flame and smoke. Who can harm thee?"

"Thou art not only my life but thou art my very wit. Go thou into the bazars and purchase what thou needest. Luck it was for us that the dead Englishman left us the gold sovereigns which we exchanged for this stuff that answereth marvelously well for our present needs."

The purchase of these necessities delayed the start. The sun was well up in the sky when they quitted the city, and they, guided by the compass, followed the route of the regular caravans to Medina.

"Thou joy of my life," Callisto exclaimed; "we will keep to the left of the main traveled road. It is safer. If the Bedouins attack us how can they stand before the thunder? If we pass to the westward we will avoid this danger, because these robbers of the desert haunt the trail where caravans mostly do venture."

When they had traveled a day's journey they left the main road, yet kept they the general direction. The sun-shades that Callisto bought mitigated the heat of the sun's rays. The patient donkeys plodded along with some speed, because a simoon had denuded the surface of the shifting sand. For this reason they made thirty leagues ere the sun went down. The beasts needed rest, yet there was no oasis in sight. They spread their robes down on the sand and slept till the dawn was breaking. Venus was the morning star that shone in the clear sky with such unwonted splendor that it gave to the letter on his breast a strange influence; yet told he not his companion because of the distress it would bring to her.

Towards the sunset of the following day they again halted. There was naught around them but a dreary waste of sand. The sun rose in a bed of sand and set in a bed of sand; no vegetation relieved the dreariness of the scene excepting some stunted specie of cactus that the donkeys devoured greedily. This saved the water supply to some extent. Thus they rested, while these hardy animals grazed upon this strange food. Sir Jasper took his spy-glass from its case, adjusted the sunshade, and swept the horizon in every direction. An exclamation of delight parted his lips. "Callisto," he said, "I see a dark round object thirty miles away. It is an oasis. To-morrow at this hour we will repose in its green shade."

Ere dawn broke they pushed forward with eager pleasure. When they had approached within ten miles of this haven of rest Callisto warned him to again use the brass tube.

"Seest thou aught of life in yon thicket?" she exclaimed. "Beware, it may be the home of the Bedouins. I pray to Allah that no living thing dwelleth there."

He raised the glass to his eye and closely scanned the spot that looked so inviting to these tired travelers. "I see naught that is human," he said. "The spot is free from danger." When they reached the cooling shade and drank of the water he examined each foot of their little world. From the camel droppings he surmised it had been three years or more since any footsteps had intruded. He made another discovery. The walls of a ruined temple that had been buried by the shifting sand offered a place of retreat that was refreshing and cool. "Callisto," he said, "here is our fortress. I pray that we may not need its protection."

"My love," Callisto said, "why goeth thou to Medina?

There is more danger than thou knowest of within its oval walls. We will pass it by."

"Nay! nay! Dost thou not see that it is so written in the parchment? There must we go, and think naught of the peril. How is it, thou sweet child, that thou knowest so much of these cities? They were a cipher to me in England. I knew not of their existence."

"I was brought up by an indulgent master. When I was but a child my parents sold me to an Arabian merchant who traded in Smyrna rugs and rich silks. He cared naught for me. He bought me that he might have gain in my sale. I have lived with caravans, and thus these places are not new to me. My beauty improved as I grew older. I was sold to the mosque in Alexandria. Thou knowest the rest of my story."

"Thou child of the desert, heaven sent thee for my deliverance. Thou asketh why I wish this fatal letter to be removed. I will tell thee. That thou lovest me I will be sworn. Thou knowest the trouble that it hath brought to me. I could live with thee always, Callisto, were this letter gone."

"I bethink me of the arms that encircled thy neck," she replied. "Whither thou goest there she will be; she will claim thee. Alas! for poor Callisto; then what wilt thou do?"

"That which a manly man would do; fear not, thou of the sad heart; if the maiden which dwelleth in England is married, then will I make thee my lawful wife; the dangers we have shared make thee doubly dear to me, so dry thine eyes, and we will journey to Medina.

"I wot not that Medina was so strongly fortified; it hath four well-guarded gates, flanked with modern walls;

as thou art familiar with the place, tell to me where we shall abide."

"It were better that we go to that part where the Egyptians dwell; follow me, and fear no danger. Go not to the mosque, unless we are recognized; we will move forward on the morrow, and may Heaven guide us, as thou knowest not where to venture after we quit this city of walls and towers."

"Thou art right, Callisto; I know not where to travel, neither know I who will read the riddle on my breast; there is a monitor here that will make the pathway plain, or this character meaneth naught."

Thus they journeyed from Medina into the desert; sandy space was their companion, the Tropic of Cancer was their destination.

Two days' journey from Medina they discovered a second oasis which was larger than the first; thither they directed their footsteps; it was far removed from the usual caravan routes, and offered them a safe haven of refuge. "Callisto, I find buried ruins here also, and I note the fact that they have a northeasterly and a southwesterly trend, as if to mark the passage of the sun and stars across the longitudinal line; here is a sundial; can it be possible that this is the end of my journey?"

"Light of my eyes," she replied, "Allah be praised that it is so; we could not find a more pleasant spot to rest; no Bedouins have ever been here, neither have caravans ever halted here."

"How knowest thou this, my good girl? I lack wofully the knowledge of desert craft; how illy fitted am I for such a life."

She laughed softly, as she answered: "The tribe from which I came were born robbers, and the generations be-

fore them were no better; if they murdered and plundered the Turks, the Turks murdered and plundered them; for this reason was I nurtured in art of detecting danger. Thou seest no camel droppings anywhere, and thou seest no ashes of fires." When they had unloaded the donkeys, and made themselves as comfortable as the circumstances of the situation justified, the maiden picked up the strange eye and moved to the outer edge of the oasis; she rested the brass tube on the decayed bark of the palm, and swept the yellow horizon in a half circle.

An exclamation of alarm from the maiden brought Sir Jasper to her side. "'Tis naught yet; perchance it is a simoon that raiseth the sand in a cloud, or it is a caravan; return to thy sitting and eat thy figpaste and thy dates in peace; if it is a caravan they will pass us by. Light of my eyes," she said, "it is a caravan; if these robbers of the desert see it, then will our refuge be invaded.

"I see another cloud of sand not so large, but more dangerous; it is the Bedouins, they are mounted on Arabian horses and move cautiously in a small but compact mass. The stupid merchants with their bales of merchandise see not the danger, or they are well prepared to resist capture; I know not which conjecture is right. Now the victims see the robbers approach; fear has made them cowards; the camels are resting on their stomachs, and form a circle around the stuffs that seem to be precious; they will make a show of resistance.

"The Bedouins scatter and form a wide circle around the travelers; the horsemen skim the ground like swallows; they are narrowing the circle; while they run they discharge a flight of arrows into the terror-stricken men and women that are on their knees; the robbers have captured the caravan, yet have they killed no one; they

are heading in this direction; the main body of the Arabs are galloping southward, only six of them guard the prisoners."

"Fear not, Callisto; nay, do not tremble, they are thirty miles from us; we are more than a match for them. Heaven be praised that no more came with the booty; I see by the glass that they have halted for the day, and will not reach this point until darkness is upon us."

"Wilt thou rescue the captives, light of my eyes?" the girl asked, "and wilt thou slay the robbers? What wilt thou do with the rich stuffs of velvet and satin? Thou seest how mine eyes sparkle with pleasure at this chance that may never come to me again."

"What can such things profit us amidst this waste of sand? When thou comest into my kingdom, thou shalt have jewels and richer silks than these; but if it suits thy fancy, take what thou wishest, this shall be thy ransom for their deliverance."

"Only that I may be beholden in thy sight; it was but to please thee, my master, that the desire came to me; 'twas but a foolish fancy; think no more of it, but let us counsel together ere they be upon us."

"We have three shots, thanks to our English friend; they have never heard the report of firearms; they will fall an easy prey, or scatter over the desert; when we are well rid of them I will unbind the captives and send them on their way rejoicing."

"Art thou not a prophet? A prophet must be a prophet; tear away the mask and he is only a man; thou wilt receive in exchange for one danger a hundred dangers; work upon their superstitious fears; conceal thy person in yon ruins; they must not see the hand that slays; I will be thy handmaid to have speech with them; I will

remove this tell-tale evidence; Arabian eyes are sharper than the eyes of a lynx."

"Thou art shrewd in thy mind and noble in thy heart; thy plans are the gateways to our safety; thou knowest how to reload these strange things that hold the sting of death; there be six to kill, and three shots only have we."

"Slay and spare not; the escape of one will bring the tented tribe upon us;" the girl said this as she handled the weapons and became familiar with the ammunition. "The captors and captives approach from the proper direction, and will squat on the thin edge of the oasis; hearest thou the cries and lamentations of the women? they well know what their fate will be."

While they were yet speaking the camels with their burdens halted at the edge of the palms; their keeper gave each one a smart blow on the animal's knees, and each in turn squatted, while its burden was removed and all piled in one heap farther in the oasis.

The helpless prisoners were huddled together a dozen paces from the Arabs; the females redoubled their lamentations, and called on Allah with an earnestness that danger inspired. The men stood apart from the women, and were taciturn, as they eyed their captors with a maliciousness that had danger in every stare. The robbers kindled a blaze with dried leaves and twigs, while they ate the prepared rice; they drank from their gourd calabashes the arrack, and now and then glanced at the group with a menacing expression that was diabolical.

Sir Jasper and his companion were hidden within the ruins, where they had concealed themselves. He glanced along the barrel of his gun, a flash, a loud report, and one of the robbers fell forward into the fire; a second and third discharge from the pistols, and two more lay

dead; the remaining three were rooted to the spot with fear, and fell easy victims to the marksmanship of the Englishman. When the smoke drifted upwards to the trees, Callisto went boldly among the captives, and said:

"Allah is good, his prophet hath saved thee; who can stand before the thunder of his voice? thy prayers have been heard." A joyous expression beamed on her face as her eyes rested on one of the rescued travelers; his long, gray beard reached to his waist, his robe was black, covered all over with cabalistic characters; among these she saw the duplicate of the one on her master's breast. "Depart not, thou strange man, I will return." Saying this she darted among the ruins, and was gone for the space of a minute. When she returned she had the parchment in her hand, and continued: "Canst thou decipher this strange lettering? thy beard is the whitened seal of wisdom."

"Not now, my daughter, my poor brain is bewildered; come to my home and it shall be as thou desireth."

"Where is thy home, thou aged man? I will surely come to thee, for the prophet hath blessed thee with ripened years."

"My home is in Petra, ten days' journey from this spot of earth. Right well I know that thou and thy friend art anxious to hold speech with me; nay, appear not confused, thou maiden of Circassia, thou art on a strange mission; though my years on earth are few, yet beats my heart with gratitude for thy timely deliverance; ask of me what thou wilt, I can deny thee naught."

"Where is thy home in Petra? Methought the ancient spot was a desolation; how sayest thou that thy home is there?"

"Seek ye among the bats and owls, they will guide thee

to my retreat; travel thou in this direction, turn thou to the senseless mummery that awaiteth thee; like stocks and stones they are bowed to earth with an homage that hath four parts of hypocrisy in the mixing." Saying which the seer turned on his heel and gathered his bundle of parchments under his arm and waited for the departure of the caravan.

Callisto secured three goatskins of water from the Armenians, and a bag of wheaten biscuits from a merchant of Alexandria. When the caravan departed Sir Jasper came from his hiding place and affectionately embraced his companion. "Each day my love for thee increaseth; thy worth is beyond compare; thus thou leadeth me on my journey. Now point me the way that the aged man showed to thee, and I will set the compass that we may have the bearings."

The next morning they departed from the spot where the dial mark had been buried for ages in the shifting sand. How many miles of travel it would have saved him if he could have known the future. But it was hidden from him by the hand of destiny; again he trod the sandy wastes hoping for a successful ending of his misfortune.

It was the twelfth day after their departure when they reached the ruins of Petra. How vast must have been the ancient city. With utter helplessness they gazed around upon the crumbling stones.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CARL AND THE WIDOW'S DAUGHTER TO WED—AN UNFORESEEN ARRIVAL.

CARL was again in London. He had a promise from Florette that when the six years expired she would surrender her hand to him. Her heart was a trust that time must redeem by pledges that love might enact.

These thoughts were in his mind as he cantered along the road to Ashton Park. The place never looked so inviting to Carl as he glanced upwards to the stately old trees that shaded the lawn; their branches spread in matted confusion over the shrubless acres. He wiped the moisture from his forehead and skirted the angle of the forest, because he longedf or the grateful shade, and the companionship of the cliff maiden.

Florette was at the wide gateway as Carl rode up. He dismounted and threw the rein to the porter. "Come, my little playmate," he said, "let us walk in the park, the coolness is inviting. What, thou art sad to-day, Florette? Nay! nay! this should not be; I will think that thy love wandereth afar amidst the sands of an Arabian desert. Dismiss the thought, and imagine thou art in Dantima wandering at will in the glen."

"I have never ceased to think of Dantima, Carl." She said this so pathetically that the young officer turned to see tears on her cheeks. "I have given thee, Carl, such love as I might, but thou canst not ask me to forget; fie upon thee that I should say as much."

"Thou hast shamed the love I bear thee; if thou sayest so we will be quits, Florette; I want no divided heart;

the crumbs of comfort are mine; upon these my famished heart must feed; hadst thou told me of this love when we were younger, I might have cast the shadow from me; now it is too late."

"Yes, Carl, it is too late; for well thou knowest the bans have been already published; our family want no more of slander's foulest harpings; we have had enough for all of the years to come." Turning to her companion, she continued: "The aged aunt thou didst resurrect from the tomb of wounded honor is like the wolf that pursueth its prey; she hath no mercy in her soul; the Mosaic law is to her a lantern to guide her feet."

"I do not comprehend thy meaning; this aunt is over-scrupulous with her devotions; she readeth the Holy Scriptures diligently from morning until night, and repeateth 'An eye for an eye,' with a solemnity that chilleth me; yet is she kind to me. I will impart to thee a secret, and thou tellest it not, she hath willed her fortune to me; much I stand in need of this wealth that is considerable. The King's cause falleth to pieces; soon will my commission be canceled; thus the money cometh not a whit too soon."

"Hast thou informed her of our marriage, Carl? Perchance she will change her mood and will it to others less worthy than thyself. Knowest thou how she hateth my dear mother?"

"She knoweth not of my love for thee; bethink thee I had not the sanction of thy acceptance to my pleadings. Now that this point is settled beyond the peradventure of a doubt, I will ride over to the cottage where she resides and acquaint her with the facts."

"Carl, we will move back to Dantima where the peace of a holy existence is more to our liking than the expendi-

tures of this vast estate. Already rumors have reached our ears that the property will be confiscated to the Commonwealth; little the loss will be to us, because the struggle for the estate has been an apple of discord that brought unjust shame to our side of the sisterhood, of which thou hast yet much to learn."

"Sit here upon this moss-covered root that runs above the ground and tell me of our family history; what is this phantom that pursues us with such malignity? I brought hither an aunt and cousin, and my mother refused to see them. I gave to my aunt that readeth the Holy Scriptures our address, and again my mother refused her that civility that even strangers should observe. Let some light into my brain that I stumble not to the falling."

"Ask thou of thy aunt that readeth the Holy Scriptures diligently, yet getteth she no farther on the road to Heaven than the old Mosaic law, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' Away with such religion, she knoweth not in her heart that Christ is risen."

"How strangely thou discourseth, Florette; I am farther from thy meaning than before. I will mount at once and seek my aunt; I must know what this all meaneth. When dost thou make the move to Dantima? that I may see Father Leonard and make such arrangements as seemeth proper."

"Within the week; the servants are even now packing the lighter movables. If thou returneth not within that time, ride to the cliff where thou wilt find us." As he was preparing to mount, she laid her hand affectionately on his arm, and said: "Let the trouble die in thy breast; the words that I have spoken are a trust, and mayest thou not suffer from the telling." She gazed after him

as he rode so steadily away, then gave a deep sigh, and returned to the mansion.

Straightway he rode to his aunt's, and without knocking he entered the small apartment that was not ceiled; the rafters and beams that had been hewn from the solid logs were smoky with age, yet gave they to the room a substantial appearance that was not in keeping with the outer walls; the place was chilly even in Spring.

His aunt wiped the moisture from her glasses with her apron, and motioned her nephew to a low stool by the bright blaze that flickered in the fireplace. He could tell by her devotional manner that she was reading sacred passages from the Holy Book. When she finished the chapter, she laid the book reverently aside as if the movement gave her pain. "What wilt thou of me, Carl? thou art a bonny lad, even unto my heart's great liking; speak, what wouldst thou?"

"I am to wed. I came first to thee to honor thee by the telling; rejoice thou with me for my soldier's life will soon be a condition of the past. I have looked forward to this day with manly pride."

"How long hast thou known her, Carl? I may ask because I will on the day thou weddest lay down a round thousand pounds, with a promise of more when the years to me no longer are. Alas! I am childless, without kith or kin; with the exception of my sisters and their children, I have no other relatives."

"Then, my dear aunt, in the sight of the law thou hast heirs; how sayest thou that thou wilt leave all of thy inheritance to me?"

" 'Twas a shrewd question, and shrewdly put; thou art wise for thy years, else thou hadst not come safely through the perils that beset thee when thou didst deliver

the despatches of King Charles to that weak ruler of Scotland. Tell to me the adventure again, for my ears do tingle with the telling; thou hadst the courage of thy ancestors that drew the long bow in the wars of their day. There is Carl, thy namesake, that sent as straight a shaft as any of the King's best archers. Edward the Black Prince commended him in like manner as good King Charles commended thee. Thou hast two rings of the House of Stuarts, and royally thou didst earn the favors."

"Nay, my good aunt, the adventure would spoil with the telling; no braggart am I; and boasting sitteth as illy on my tongue as the vile lotions of the leeches craft; I pray thee that I may be excused."

"Thou art right, my boy, be not puffed up in thine own estimation, for as this good book sayeth: 'A haughty spirit goeth before a fall.' Tell me of the maiden thou lovest; hath she black or brown eyes, grey or blue; is she flaxen-haired, or is she raven-haired. I bespeak a good word for thy taste; in such love a youth of thy years hath that nice discrimination that maketh such a choice his heart's desire."

"Thou shouldst know her, since she is thy niece, a bonnier bride never graced an altar."

"Carl, thou meanest Ella Oakly, the one that thou so bravely rescued from the roundheads. She is a bonny lass, yet I like not the thought that thou wilt marry thy cousin; yet if it pleaseth thee, I will not say thee nay. Am I right in the guess thereof?"

"It is the Widow Deycourt's daughter that I would wed; the family have had more than their share of the rough knocks that this world giveth to those who are down."

When the young officer had delivered him of this speech, he turned his head three-quarters around and saw a sight that startled him. The aged head of his aunt was lying upon the table, her coil of hair had loosened, her gray hair was spread over the table; a faintness came over her that resembled death. He rushed to her side and from his flask of rum he poured a small quantity down her throat; the stimulant revived her; she sat upright in her seat and glared at Carl as one that had not her senses.

For the space of a minute she gazed sadly at the boy; her mind was a busy workshop, wherein the conflicting emotions of love and duty bravely battled. She was tempted for the nonce to bury the past forever; the sight of Carl's bright and happy face unnerved her; his morning of life was at the dawning, hers was beyond the gray shadows of twilight; but the past came like the pleadings of a devil to wreck the good intentions of the moment; her face hardened, her pale lips thinned out to a straight line, as she slowly repeated: "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth."

"Oh, my aunt, do not look so terrible; what have I said to make such a change in thy manner? what is this terrible thing that hangs like an avalanche over our heads and is ready to crush us? what does it all mean?"

"I pray, Carl, that thou mayest never know. Of one thing be assured, Florette and thyself can never wed; I am certain on this point. There are other girls as fair to look upon. Thou knowest the proverb: 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.' I hurt myself in telling this to thee; it hurts me here, but I command thee now that thou shalt not wed this niece of mine on pain of disinheritance."

"Yet thou tellest me not the reason why; thou art unreasonable in this silence that conjureth up a hundred dread misgivings, and maketh my heart a target for the busy doubts that haunt my brain."

"Go, my son; leave me now; another time thou shalt know all. May God's blessings rest upon thee."

Carl hastened to inform his mother of the approaching nuptials; the lightness of his heart was gone. When he came into her presence there was a subdued sadness in the news that more nearly resembled the passing of a soul. "My mother," he said, "knowest thou that Florette and myself are to wed? thou wilt give us thy blessing; within the week Widow Deycourt will return to Dantima; the estate is to be confiscated to the crown; they will live in the cottage again."

"My son, thou bringest me strange news all in a breath. How will they bear up with the bitter persecution that will the more harass them, since the Lord Protector is in power, and King Charles hath fled to Scotland; even under the laws of Charles they were unruly even unto violence, and now they return to court the danger afresh."

"A thought hath taken possession of my mind; these heartless burghers did hound these innocent persons because the widow bought the property from the Council, and in the possession thereof did induce the evil spirits to molest the peace of Dantima, when my father was to blame; the books of the alchemist were filled with strange characters, and thus Sir Jasper gained a knowledge of that letter on his breast; since father quitted the burgh no lights have been seen, neither have the strange sounds been heard."

Carl's mother did not answer these queries; her mind was touched, as she soliloquized: "Again have we been

the means of bringing misfortune to the innocent; I see it all; what a strange power Providence is, it smiteth for some wise purpose the innocent, and prospereth the ungodly. Carl," she said this slowly, "hast thou thought well of this marriage, hast thou the means to support a wife, for love liveth not on air; it has taken thy earnings to support us, and now thou tellest me that Florette hath not so much as the price of a bodkin."

"Let it be so, we will wed; the pool hath fishes, the meadow hath lambs that may be had for the raising; the soil yieldeth its increase to the diligent hand of toil; what more asketh thou?"

"Well, and truly spoken, thou lovelorn swain; be it as thou wisheth; hast thou named the day? Father Leonard will perform the marriage ceremony. I hope that this match will bring happiness to thee, but God well knows that I have my doubtings on the subject."

Carl did not mention his interview with his aunt to his mother, and thus the subject rested for the present.

The busy preparations for the wedding drove the unwelcome ghosts of the past from the field of the present. As the day drew nearer, Florette absented herself from the family gathering; she sought the solitude of the Grotto of Our Lady. For hours at a time would she gaze at the stone cross until it seemed to be a living thing that sympathized with her in her trouble. Father Leonard killed every hope of her wandering lover's return; he narrated minutely the ghostly visit of the cavalier monk. With patient resignation she bowed to the inexorable hand of destiny.

Some change had come to the citizens of Dantima, whose victorious cause brought a self-laudation that satisfied wounded pride. The widow and her family came

and went at pleasure, because the alchemist, by request of Carl, left his cabalistic tomes in London. For this reason no manifestations of the evil one brought terror to the minds of the dwellers in the burgh of Dantima.

Carl, in his boyish enthusiasm, did not notice the paleness on the cheeks of his intended bride. He made frequent trips to the glen and brought armsful of ivy and holly to bedeck the Cathedral; his fancy devised a bower in the forefront of the altar, with sprigs of mistletoe interwoven with the wreaths of flowers. It was well that love was blind in this instance, because Florette's heart and mind were buried in the sands of an Arabian desert; the broken vows drifted back through the aisles of the years to reproach her for her faithlessness. Thus Carl found her on the day of their wedding.

"What, Florette! thy eyes are thus filled with tears; nay, this will never do." He folded three or four large sycamore leaves and brought from the spring some water to bathe her swollen lids; passively she permitted him to lave them, and they returned to Carl's home where she was dressed by loving hands for the ceremony.

The wedding cortege moved deliberately through the streets of Dantima to the Cathedral where the priest was waiting to unite the pair in the holy bands of wedlock. Under the mistletoe bough they stood while Father Leonard spake the solemn words that partly made them man and wife, when he came to the solemn words, "If any one knoweth cause why this young couple may not wed, speak now, or forever afterwards hold thy peace."

A shrill voice from the gathering within the church shrieked: "In the name of God, I forbid this marriage."

"Advance to the altar, thou challenger of these marital rites, and give us thy reasons for this untimely disturb-

ance; get thee hence, or the beadle will remove thee." Father Leonard saw a stately old-fashioned dame walk slowly up the aisle; her stiffly starched ruffles almost concealed the upper part of her head, whose coiffure was surmounted with a golden comb. When she came to the chancel railing she reiterated what she had said in the back part of the Cathedral, and in a clear, convincing tone of voice, exclaimed: "They are brother and sister. In the name of Cromwell, the Lord Protector, forbear!" Then she glided along the nave to the entrance, and was gone.

Florette's mother rushed forward and shrieked in her shrillest voice: "Thou liest in thy throat, thou hoary-headed sinner; thou art a lunatic, a mad woman, that should be confined in a madhouse. I have suffered enough from the world's cruel tongue, and now thou heapest more infamy upon me." When she had uttered these words she sank lifeless upon the pavement. Carl dipped both hands into the holy water of the font and dashed it on her face; they opened one of the stained-glass windows; the fresh, pure air revived her, and she was conveyed upon a stretcher to the cliff.

The Cathedral was deserted, a chill of horror fell upon the people that crowded the aisles; they withdrew to their homes to speak in bated breaths of the widow's misfortune.

Florette was secretly pleased at the turn of love's tide; her gratitude to Carl for the prompt succor in her hours of danger had builded up in her heart a false sentiment that would have made her an unwilling bride; now the old love came back with augmented force, and in her soul she watched and waited for the wanderer's return.

Carl's anger at the unseemly conduct of his aunt was

beyond all bounds. He returned to London and sought his relative; she was as usual reading the pages of holy writ, and scarcely noticed her nephew as he strode up to where she was sitting, and ranted: "Why didst thou not tell me of this, my aunt, ere I made of myself a target for ill-mannered tongues to shoot at, and Florette, think of the shame thou hast brought to her, think of the agony that rended the widow's heart. What aileth thee, hast thou lost thy mind in this vindictive pursuit of innocence? Tell us of this unrighteous slur that has brought unhappiness to us all."

"Go to, my nephew, and seek not to know more, to thy disfavor."

Carl continued with increasing warmth: "Thou hast repaid my kindness by delivering this cruel blow that has wrecked my happiness forever. Give thy wealth to others, throw it to the dogs in the street, I care not one whit for a penny thou hast; thy offering I fling back in thy teeth."

"Softly, Carl, thou art a hot-headed youth, thy words have little worth to me; I could not blight the hopes of thy young life by confessing to thee the terrible secrets that have outlived the years; thy ambitions in the cause of Charles would have had an untimely birth and a speedy death; did I not warn thee, and thou heedest not the warning?"

When he departed from his aunt's house he betook him to the workshop of his father; there he passed his days watching the skillful compounding of the chemical elements that melted in the glowing crucibles; he envied this man his contentment, this man that dreamed his life away in the search for the philosopher's stone that would transmute baser metals into gold and silver; he envied him his talents that made him a master of his art. While

this alchemist could never create Silurian fissures, or a world, he could at least wear out his existence solving the hardest of nature's puzzles, and thus remove himself from the petty cares of life.

Carl loved not Florette, her presence was distasteful to him. In the seclusion of his home the shadows of misanthropy grew deeper as the weeks went by. He avoided the cliff and its inmates.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE KING'S MESSENGER AND THE ARABIAN ASTROLOGER.

"No MAN liveth here," Sir Jasper exclaimed, as he cast his glances about him and picked his way between broken columns and walls; he mounted upon a small mound that perhaps hid the marble entrance of some palace of ancient Petra; the same awful desolation spread before him in every direction.

"Callisto, here will we tether the brutes, and rest for the night; the day is far to its closing, mayhap the morrow will direct our steps aright, and we will see again the seer with his strange garment; the beasts of burden will have their browsing, for the pasturage is limitless; and thou sayest so, we can have roasted kid for our evening meal. Seest thou the mother with her young as they bound away?"

"For my sake, slay not the harmless goats; let them live."

"Be it as thou sayest, but 'tis a tempting shot for one who loveth the sport for the sport's sake. Prepare thou the meal while I wander among these ruins that I may find the strange letter or the opening that leadeth to this astrologer's cave."

"Thou hast found naught to guide thy footsteps, thou light of my soul?" The girl asked this as she sat upon the slight elevation and consumed the food that hunger made appetizing. When they had eaten to their filling, they drank lightly of the water in the leathern bags, and laid down to rest. The piercing howls of the jackals and the lonely hootings of the owls disturbed their sleep;

with upturned faces they gazed upon the stars and slept among the desolation of centuries.

"Didst thine ear catch the strange sound, Callisto? Methought I heard that that sounded uncanny; perchance it was the subconsciousness of the first sleep that visited my tired brain."

"Well do I hear the disturbance thou speaketh of, it cometh from beneath the ground whereon we lie. I hear the noise of tramping feet, the clatter of wheels scurrying over paved streets, together with the heavenly music that cometh to my ears. What meaneth it, do we take leave of our senses?"

Deep sleep fell upon them; the world with its teeming crust was slipping from beneath them as they plunged headlong into space; a dreamy languor filled them with pleasurable sensations; pain, an earthly heritage, returned to its natural home; they were treading the streets of some ancient city; strangely dressed people filled the magnificent bazaars where Oriental merchandise was offered for sale to the luxuriously attired loungers; impatient steeds yoked to brass chariots pawed the stones, or flew along the marble streets.

These desert wanderers were unnoticed, for all were busy with the events of their peculiar lives. It was a city of pleasure where work was unknown; the swinging gardens were filled with happy idlers, scores of harps discoursed the sweetest melody, perfumed fountains tossed cooling spray upon the rare exotics of an eastern clime that bloomed in perpetual sunshine.

The theatres were crowded with beautiful women and handsome men; the choruses and masques strutted upon the great stage to tempt the plaudits of the vast throng

that filled the seats with generous patrons; the squares were lined with countless statues. Statues whose shapely proportions were garlanded with wreaths of roses; the cold, white marble breathed a sensuous longing in every cunningly carved line. It was a city without shrines, altars, or temples, a city without gods and without religion, where life's short day was one endless round of pleasure. Mad revelry ruled this strange world where wine was the water of life, and enervate people sipped from golden cups and filled the air with song. The sorrow of human hearts and faces was not there to mar the rippling peals of laughter that floated from everywhere.

No childish laughter came to their ears, because no children were there. Old age never left a wrinkle on the brows of these strange beings because there were no old people; no cemeteries filled with costly monuments or grassy-grown graves were there to remind them of immortality. It was a city without a beginning, and a city that had no ending; it was Petra, with its soulless bodies that laugh forever and know naught of decay.

When Callisto and the King's messenger awoke they stared at the ceiling of some grand ruins. Their astonishment increased as they looked steadfastly at the astrologer who sat at a marble table. A single bronze lamp was burning. The wick immersed in oil had nearly burned out. They knew this because the smell became offensive. He was as immovable as a statue; the same cabalistic robe covered his person; one hand was supporting his chin, wherefrom a long, white beard almost hid the top of the table; his eyes were fixed upon the pages of an open book.

They turned from this silent figure to note the odd brass

instruments that crowded one end of the apartment. The thought came to Sir Jasper that they were used for measuring celestial distances. "Callisto," he said, "the man sleepeth soundly; he hath not moved so much as a finger. This suspense is trying to my nerves. I will cough and thus arouse him. And yet he sleeps. I have made noise enough to awaken one-half of the world. I will go to him; I can no longer stand this silence." With this purpose in his mind he cautiously approached the aged man, and started back in alarm. "He is dead, Callisto, and hath not an ounce of blood in his veins. Ah! woe is me! And he hath not read the sign. After all of these years of danger and hardship he hath passed away with my secret in his dead brain. Ah! woe is me! The book that is before him may cast some brightness over this gloom."

"See!" the maiden exclaimed, "these pages are duplicates of the pages thou hast in thy blouse; there lieth some hope for thee in this. Be not cast down, thou light of my eyes."

"Who will solve the meanings? Alas! not myself, for the soldier usurped the student in my making. Alack! that I should say so much. Callisto!" he hissed in a startled whisper, "the blood floweth back from the ebb of life; the body warmeth; I can see his blue veins fill out, and the pulse throbbeth with energy, and last of all he openeth his eyes. May Heaven bless thee, old man; I thought thou wert dead, and my secret gone with thee."

A faint smile played for a moment upon the seer's thin lips, as he answered: "Surprise hath taken possession of thy senses. I blame thee not, for thou hast much to learn. The material world sometimes passes the confines of the

spiritual world, and then the soul returneth to the body that sheltereth it."

"Thou wise man, how can my senses follow thee in thy world of knowledge, since I am but a soldier of fortune that knoweth more of splitting crowns or smiting off limbs than the knowledge that taketh years of study to master?"

"My son, my soul hath been on a journey that I may explain to thee the scroll and the meaning on thy breast."

"Meanest thou that thy soul and body parted company for a space of time, and then thy soul returneth to its house of clay?"

"Is it more wonderful than thy dreams, or the suspended animation that disturbed thee so much?"

"What a mystery is life as thou showeth it to me!" exclaimed Sir Jasper, with startled excitement, for he comprehended the meaning of the astrologer's words, and continued: "Canst thou send my invisible self to Dantima?"

Without noticing the interruption, the aged man continued: "There is no life or death—only a change—as heat and cold hath no division of its force, only a gradation or mergence of degrees, so it is with life and death. You were in a strange city last night. You were walking through the busy streets of Petra as it existed centuries ago."

"Were they alive?" Callisto asked.

"Their souls were freed from their chrysalises of clay so long ago that time is forgotten. Life exists under a million conditions by the agency of change. We step from one existence to another, yet both may travel side by side through the depths of eternal space."

"God wot but it was a day to be thankful for, the day

that I met thee, when thou and thy attendants were sorely beset in the desert. I am in a land of wonders."

"My son, it is vulgar to show such weakness; to-night, as thou wisheth I will send thy soul to Dantima, and thy body shall be none the worse for thy journey." The astrologer arose from his seat and walked across the mosaic pavement to a roughly constructed larder where provisions were stored. Callisto, seeing his intentions, aided the old man. Together they spread the evening meal that they might refresh their bodies, for the day's fast had enhungered them. The wine was rich with its antiquity, and the goats' milk and porridge, the dates, and the freshly gathered almonds filled their appetites with contentment.

"How did it happen to thy mind, my reverent friend, that there was such a city as Dantima, seeing that thou dwellest in this desert of desolation, and no one from the outside world cometh to thee?"

A smile played for a moment over the seer's features, as he replied: "We have an agency there, a circle of magnetic influence that seemeth to be a scourge to the people that dwell within the walled town. Yet are these spirits pure as heaven's air, and not the devil's leaguers as they be so pleased to name them. These kind spirits do continually pray for the welfare of mortal souls, and look with sorrow upon the perversity of mortal man."

"The same spirits that placed this sign of sorrow upon my breast; didst thou, oh, wise man, tell to me as much in what thou hast spoken?"

"Thou hast reasoned aright, my son. There is a strange destiny yet in store for thee ere thou returnest to thy native land. The sweet voice that sayeth to thee: 'Come to me, thou are mine,' hath a unison with the gray cell

matter of thy brain in the number of vibrations, and thus her voice cometh to thee over the wastes of water and sand. The strange music that came to save thee from the pitfalls of sin is likewise a unison of vibrations."

"Why, thou seer, should this mysterious influence be confined to one city and not to others—say, London, for illustration?"

"Wist ye not that the parchment thou hast in thy bosom was severed from the book of wisdom possessed by yon alchemist in Dantima? For this reason do such influences exist to make Dantima a hot-bed of superstition."

"If the book were destroyed what would the happening be?"

"This power goeth where this book of wisdom goeth, and no mortal shall say them yea nor nay."

"Explain to me, O wise seer, this parchment that I have so carefully preserved." As the wanderer said this he carefully unwrapped the precious document and spread it before his host.

"The Tropic of Cancer is half way between Medina and Mecca. The mark on thy breast is well known to ancient astrologers as the sign of the planet Venus, which is most brilliant five weeks before and five weeks after superior conjunction; the star will then cast a shadow at night. If it has reached its highest northern latitude it will shine even at mid-day. This position of the planet occurs once in eight years. Upon this circumstance dependeth thy fate."

"Will I yet await this period of time ere the letter be removed?" Sir Jasper's heart was troubled at this answer to his question, whereupon the seer studied for a moment some calculations he had made, and answered:

"Thou art, indeed, fortunate, my son; in eleven months

the star will cast its shadow upon the Tropic of Cancer at the oasis where thou didst deal destruction to the Bedouin robbers; then stand thou in the star's shadow, and the letter will trouble thee no more."

"Why was I so peculiarly marked?"

"Because the sign of the Zodiac telleth me thus much, thy star was so situated at thy birth thou couldst not forego the journey to Dantima as the King's messenger; it was so written in the sky."

"I catch not thy meaning, noble-minded astrologer."

"Affinities in space attract when the poles are unlike. Thou understandeth not this now. Thou must learn for thyself this truth, which will come to thee, never fear; if thou art spared, thou wilt be honored beyond thy reckoning. Stay with me to-night; to-morrow thou must travel far and fast, for time is precious to thee. Recline upon yon cushions, thou and thine; I must to my task."

The noble man placed Callisto in a comfortable position and drew the curtains around her, while the sibyl bended over the leaves of his clasped book. When these arrangements were completed Sir Jasper settled his tired body on these cushions that reminded him of the mosque in Alexandria. For a time he listened to the ceaseless scratching of the quill-pen at the other side of the apartment; then a sense of drowsiness stole upon him, and he slept soundly.

When the tired traveler was breathing heavily the aged man arose from his leathern-bound seat and moved noiselessly to the corner, where a recess in the wall concealed a tier of shelves. He took from the top one a dark blue bottle and approached his guest. When the seer reached the side of the slumbering man he saturated a cloth with the mixture and applied it softly to the nose of

he of the fatal letter. Seven times the hypnotizer moved his hand forward and backward until he counted ten; then the necromancer watched closely the sleeper's face, which became livid, as if death had left its mark thereon.

A strange-looking brass instrument was placed over Sir Jasper. The circles and divisions of circles were carefully adjusted. When this was done the seer resumed his ceaseless toil. He gazed at the altitude of the stars and closed the opening. The cone-shaped instrument was removed from his subject. A compound mixture from another bottle was fanned across his face. The livid appearance on the drowsy man's face reddened into the flush of health.

When morning light came palely through the openings that admitted air, he of the tireless wisdom aroused the sleeper by cheerfully exclaiming: "A good morrow to thee, my son; thy brothers in Dantima, how were they, and how fareth it with those thou lovest?"

"The one I wished most to see was absent; those that I did see were well, but wofully frightened. They will now mourn me as though I were dead. In our far-away land when a ghost appeareth it maketh assurance doubly sure, and she that I loveth will straightway wed."

"Be not cast down; when thou comest again this way I will have tidings for thee. Thou must depart at once, or another dreary eight years will find thee a servitor to the power of the unseen world. Thy brothers only saw thee; thy trouble is borrowed. A tenant should quit his house at pleasure and return so long as the fabric remaineth whole and is not touched by the fingers of decay."

While the old man was thus discoursing, the travelers were preparing to depart. "Which is my path that leadeth hence that I may see the reckonings? Let it be straight

as an arrow's flight, for I want not to lose an hour in this journey that is beset with such dangers."

When he had noted the direction of his goal he also took reckonings of the exact position of the oasis.

CHAPTER XX.

CARL AND HIS IRON-HEARTED AUNT.

THE Widow Deycourt and her daughter were comfortably settled in the stone cottage on the Devil's Elbow. This property that they bought from the Council of Dantima belonged to them by reason of a subsequent purchase; for this reason it was not included in the confiscation act of Cromwell, an act that transferred Ashton Park to the holdings of the Commonwealth, and left them without a home in London.

Florette seldom quitted the house. If she reclined on the moss-covered rocks, Carl made her life unhappy by his pleadings. The solitude invited a train of thought that rendered her nights sleepless. Between these extremes the flush on her cheeks faded to a pearly white; the elasticity of hope was gone; with listless apathy she dreamed of the King's messenger, and performed the household duties with a regularity that was methodical.

She bended over each bucket of water that she brought from the spring, and mused in this manner: "What will he think of me when he returns from a foreign land? My poor, faded beauty will not impress him as it did in the years that were so happy with their brave promises; the years that have slipped away, and still the silence is unbroken. Come back to me, my father lover; come back to heal the cruel wound thy absence brings to me."

The voice of Carl grated harshly upon her ears, as he pleaded: "I would give my life, Florette, were those sweet words intended for me."

"Carl, you come again to hurt my heart. Do not plead

your cause, for it is hopeless; thou art as mad-minded as thy aunt, whose ideas of mercy and justice are rantings of hypocrisy; though she sayeth long prayers, and readeth from the book of Holy Writ, yet is her heart and mind a hot-bed of hate that passeth my understanding."

His face flushed redly at these stinging remarks. Right well he knew of his aunt's shortcomings, yet had he ne'er been told so plainly of her faults. A certain resentment in his nature was aroused, yet he answered her naught, while he gazed seaward at the white caps of the waves as they came rollicking towards the bay inlet.

"Carl," she queried, "dost thou think for one moment that I would wed thee with such a horrible suspicion hanging over our lives? Not for the wealth of England would I be thy wife."

"Suppose this suspicion were removed, wouldst thou then forego the promise thou madest me in London?"

"I have broken no promise to thee, Carl. The King's messenger is not dead. The monks in the Monastery of Dantima were much perturbed by the sudden appearance of this absent brother dressed in the costume of a Turkish merchant. Think not that I am of unsound mind because I tell thee this, hope springs anew in my poor heart."

"Thou believest this, my little playmate? Surely thy sorrows have unhinged thy reason. If such were true, it should prove to thee that he is over in the great beyond. Surely his living body was not borne upon the winds from the Desert of Arabia to the Monastery of Dantima."

"I will so believe; impressions come to us in a mysterious way; how it cometh no man can tell. My love and my heart tell me he is not dead, so have done with thy pleadings and tell me of thy daily happenings. Has the burgh smoothed the edges of resentment to usward,

or do their broodings of hatred still set on the nest of expectancy to hatch another setting of trouble?"

"They bear thee and thine no particular ill will; the lessons they have learned so well in the past are not forgotten; yet go thou not within yon gray wall; time will heal the wound."

"God be praised that it is so; I would see Father Leonard and gather the tangled ends of this ghostly story."

"I shall journey straightway to London and compel this aunt of mine to produce her evidence," exclaimed Carl, with some warmth. "I must know the truth to the clearance of my good name that now hath a cloud hanging over it to the misery of my existence."

"Go not there, Carl; let the fires of hate die out; let not thy replenishing fan the flame that hath already made such headway in our lives."

"If thou and thine be innocent, what mattereth the vaporings of these scandal-loving wretches that feed upon dead men's bones."

"Have it thy way; go, thou fire-brand of destruction; time will add to thy store of reason when it is too late." When she had thus spoken, she went within and closed the door.

Without more ado the rejected and dejected wooer straightway went to the home of his mother, saddled his mare, and rode to London.

His relative had moved away from the strongly-built house with the smoke-discolored rafters. The present inmates could not tell him where she was, nor could they tell him to what locality she had moved. All of the information he received led him to believe that he would locate her on the other side of London.

"It is better thus," he said, as he rode in the direction indicated. "I hope this will end the family feud that has existed for two generations. Why should I persecute Florette with my attentions? She is sincere in her devotion to the cavalier. Yet I must clear up the mystery that hangs over my own life; it is a duty that I owe to myself." As he was thus soliloquizing he glanced sharply at the rows of houses that faced the quiet streets of this ancient part of the town. He sought this street because the sect to which she belonged predominated in this locality.

"How bootless this misguided search," he said; "I might ride up and down all day and not find her." He reined his steed sharply to the right and cantered along the side highway. His busy thoughts were elsewhere, consequently he did not see the young girl that was carrying a well-filled basket from one side of the street to the other. He drew his reins quickly, and none too soon. The front shoulder of his mare knocked the maiden down and scattered the contents of her basket in the dust.

He dismounted and raised her to her feet. He brushed the dust from her dress and replaced the vegetables in the wicker basket. Her little treble voice startled him, as she cried in an agitated manner: "Why, it is Master Carl."

"Is it thou, my good girl? And I have hurt thee."

"Not so badly, my young master, that it might not be worse. A few bruises that arnica will heal. Carry thou the load, and I will limp by thy side."

Carl, thus through an accident, strengthened his resolve to demand of his aunt a full explanation, and even blessed the hand of Providence that He directed his footsteps thither. When he was come into the presence of his relative he exclaimed: "It is well met that we are, some

strange destiny has brought us face to face. Wherefore shouldst thou not tell me of my parentage? It is the will of God."

"From whence art thou, Carl? It maketh these old eyes glad to see thee once more. How left thou those I love in Dantima? I ask thee this question because I learned indirectly that thou and thine had removed thither."

"Mother is fairly in good health; father still dreameth his life away in vain pursuits; both of them have sad hearts because the Widow Deycourt pineth herself away in regrets. She hath shrunken to a shadow of her womanhood. We blame thee for this, and deplore the hardness of thy heart that refuseth to listen to the pleadings of mercy."

"They told me that the Widow Deycourt was in Italy." A steely glitter came into her cold, gray eyes as she repeated this in a hushed whisper. "I wot not that she is so near. I tell thee again, Carl, that the knowledge thou seeketh is to thy undoing. It will come to thee soon enough. In a fortnight thou shalt know all to thy filling."

Her nephew understood not the purport of her speech. In his heart he rejoiced that through his efforts a reconciliation had come about, while she understanding not the exuberance of his spirits, wondered that he should feel so elated at her manner of making such a promise.

With a lighter heart he journeyed to Dantima. He hummed little love ditties, and thought how fairly he would stand in the eyes of the maiden he loved. She would relent, and renew the promise she made to him. He thought thus because he posed as a peacemaker, the family would be reunited, and the past would be forgotten. He spake not of his visit to his aunt to anyone, and

waited from day to day for the answer that she had promised to him.

When Carl bade his aunt good-bye she drew from its case the precious Holy Bible—it was precious because it cost, in those days, a goodly number of pounds sterling. She opened the book without intention. The parting of the pages therefore disclosed the teachings of the Mosaic law. The pages were thumb-marked by constant reference thereto, yet were the pages of the New Testatment a sealed treasure that her humanity had not so much as investigated.

The reading thereof strengthened her resolution as she muttered: "She hath brought woe to my heart, why should I spare her for the family's sake?" She strode to the closet from whence she had taken the Bible, and drew from thence the glass box that the alchemist had tested, and straightway went forth to accuse her own sister of murder.

It was an easy matter to find a barrister of the King's bench; it was an easy matter to lay this evidence before the prosecuting officer; it was an easy matter to issue the warrant for her sister's arrest.

It was not an easy matter to undo the deed that had such a strange ending. When the scales fell from her eyes, then would she see the wisdom of adversity, but it would come to her when it was too late. The day after her visit to the barrister a bailiff of the law rode to Dantima, and in the name of the Commonwealth arrested the widow Deycourt and locked her in the gloomy prison house of Dantima.

This calamity fell heavily upon the persecuted family. The burghers that formerly detested the widow now rallied to her support. Her cell was furnished with all of the comforts of home. Florette and Nattie were with her

constantly. Yet was the prisoner closely guarded. Carl was frantic with grief and rage. He now understood the part he had played in bringing misfortune to Florette's mother. In his anger he cursed his aunt, and pleaded with Florette for forgiveness. "Canst thou forget this unhappy thing that I have done?" Carl pleaded in a broken-hearted way.

"Foolish boy, did I not plead with thee that thou go not to London? And straightway thou goest from my presence to inform thy cruel-hearted aunt of our presence in England."

"Why use such a subterfuge if thy mother be innocent? If thy cause is just, fear not thou the world, unless the English law is ill administered. I believe that thy fears overmaster thee."

"Dost thou remember, Carl, how diligently Nattie sought for papers in yon Custom House? Wot ye not what such findings meant? Had we found that for which we sought, how eagerly would we have challenged this revengeful woman to the list of justice."

"Alas, I do but stumble in the pathway of destiny. Thy mother is innocent, yet for lack of this evidence will she suffer the penalty of the law. I will ride straight to London and tell this aunt of mine that thou hast such evidence. Then will she withdraw the charges. If she will remain stubborn, seek thou in flight the safety that shall cheat the law."

"For shame, Carl! thinkest thou that we would do so damnable a thing? Now, such conduct would jeopardize our cause, which is just in God's eyes. The end will come quickly, and God be with the innocent, is my prayer."

"When will the trial be set? Hast thou legal advice? Should an unhappy ending come of my meddling, then death to me will be a welcome visitor."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE KING'S MESSENGER HAS A STRANGE ADVENTURE.

SIR JASPER'S heart smote him as he listened to the advice of the seer, whose future visionings saw the barrenness of the route that was before the Englishman. For this reason he reasoned with Callisto in this manner:

"Remain thou with this good man. Thy forbearance has been wonderful up to this point. We have traveled over well-beaten tracks, where water and provisions were to be had for the price of gold. Whither I go is far from the haunts of caravans. The privations that lead to destiny are beset with dangers that will overtax thy strength."

"Dost thou falter in thy allegiance to me? Or is it that thou tirest of her who would not live without the sunshine of thy existence. Death in yon desert were better than the anxiety thy absence would bring to me. Say no more, for I am resolved to bear the burden of thy hardships, be they much much or little."

"Thou hast a brave companion in yon tender stripling. Say her not nay, I beseech thee, but go forward on thy journey. Hold! fill thy water bags to overflowing from yon cistern. Here is a bag of dried goats' meat and the dates; eat sparingly of what thou hast. Travel thou by the light of the stars and sleep thou during the day. Thou wilt not need the assistance of thy magnetized needle; the letter on thy breast will guide thee when thou hast traversed fully one-half of the way. And now, farewell. May Allah be with thee."

When the aged man had thus spoken he withdrew to

his labors. The travelers picked their way through the ruins, and moved off in a northeasterly direction. They were guided by the needle and the stars through wastes of sand that were destitute of vegetation. No cooling oasis tempered the severity of their undertaking. Thrice daily he swept this ocean of desolation for some hope for the morrow. The glass gave ever the same flat field of view. Not even a cactus plant gladdened their eyes, to tickle the palates of their faithful beasts.

The fiery rays of the sun parched the voyagers' tongues until they were swollen and feverish. They were even tempted to drain the water in the goat-skin bags. The handsful of dried grass with which they fed the donkeys were moistened with water, that the brutes might not sink from exhaustion. Their braying startled the silence of this vast plain. The sand became so hot that their feet were blistered.

"Light of my life, these many days have we journeyed, and yet the end is not in sight. We can neither escape by advancing, nor can we escape by retracing our steps; our tomb will be roomy enough."

"Say not so," replied Sir Jasper, "we can kill the donkeys for food, and press forward on foot. We have traversed one-half of the distance. This character on my breast speaks to me in no uncertain tones; and I bethink me that some coolness cometh to us from the north. The blessed dew gathered on the clean piece of linen that I placed upon the rock. The character of the surface over which we have come is changing, to the betterment of our position."

"Nay, kill not these faithful beasts of burden that have eased the hardships of our travel. Allah has provided for our wants that the animals may live. Didst thou notice

the strange birds that shyly skim the horizon? There is a mole that this bird feedeth upon, and this mole feedeth upon grass nuts hereabouts."

"How provident is thy wit, thou stripling, as the aged man called thee. Yet will we not need these treasures that would feed the starving. I see in the distance a long, low streak that may be land; or it may be a bank of clouds. The glass bringeth it not near that we may better investigate. Two days journey will bring us thither."

The third day they reached this unknown land that was not charted on the maps. The civilization astonished them. The verdure was broken here and there by the plow of the husbandman. Groves of trees dotted the landscape. It was an oasis of large proportions. The strange character was everywhere. These interchanges of thought were interrupted by the approach of a squadron of superbly mounted horsemen, whose barbaric splendor was phenomenal.

"Callisto, speak thou to them, that we may make known our wishes."

"Light of my life, they speak no tongue known to me."

When they drew nearer, the chieftan placed his riders upon each side of Sir Jasper and his companion. In silence they moved through the strange city, where the streets were circles that widened as the distance from the temple increased. The soldiers kept the curious subjects back until a pavilion was lowered from the wall, in which they were seated. Then they were elevated to the top of this enclosure.

"Callisto, my good girl, we are prisoners. Play thou the slave's part. I will beat thee; do thou cry out in pain that all may hear thy screams."

Callisto gave her companion a grateful pressure of the

hand, and in wonderment exclaimed: "Didst thou note the hundreds of pillar-porticoes that shade the sidewalks? Carven serpents are wrought upon the columns everywhere. What strange god do these worship? Look thou within; I see no temple. The great square is ornamented with fountains, walks and strange flowers that have no perfume. Yet are they rich in their coloring. These feed upon insects. I see no homes within these walls. Ten galleries, tier on tier, rise from the bottom of the enclosure even unto the top. The inhabitants live in continuous apartments that stretch along these verandas."

"Callisto, didst thou note the outside of the wall that towereth aloft fully two hundred feet? It is of polished porphyry. The white crystals of feldspar look like flakes of snow upon a dark background of purple. The joints of the blocks fit so truly that the eye cannot perceive a break in the lustrous surface."

While this conversation was progressing they were waiting for the chief to return. At a signal from him, the pavilion was lowered on the inside to the third tier of galleries. They were blindfolded and led by the hands along the passageways, thence down winding stairways to a chamber, where they were left to themselves. The silken scarf was removed from the eyes of each. The light that reached them was reflected light that came from a hundred mirrors set in the walls.

"Callisto, the astrologer is right. Never yet have these eyes of mine beheld such magnificence. I have seen king's palaces. This surpasses them all. The combined cost of ten English castles would not pay for the furnishing of this apartment. As thou seest, the letter is everywhere."

"Light of my life," Callisto remarked, "there are thy robes sparkling with precious gems. The perfumed bath

awaiteth thee. It will be scant ablution that will remove the dust of travel from my body. I wish not to wear these costly gewgaws that will enhance the beauty that is thine. Rather will I stain with a deeper stain my flesh, that I may not be separated from thee."

"Wise art thou for thy years. When I cough violently do thou place the vessel of gold to my lips. I know not who this ruler be. Whether it be a king or a queen, I know not, neither care I; they shall not part thee from me, my good girl. So wipe thine eyes and be ready, for the royal servitor approacheth. We will go forward to meet our fate."

They moved through a wilderness of arches and halls unto the throne room.

The Moorish architecture of a score of palaces had been worked into this vast hall. The effect was bewildering. The brocaded curtains, ottomans and rugs rivaled in matchless perfection the mosaic pavements, over which they walked in slippered feet. The beautiful native women that stood in a semi-circle around the throne bowed with the precision of automatons as Sir Jasper advanced to the flight of marble steps that reached to the canopied seat whereon sat the ruler of this strange kingdom.

He felt the grotesqueness of his position as he bended gallantly forward and made his obeisance to the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. Yet no word came from his lips. He would have given his earldom for an interpreter. He coughed violently; this brought Callisto to his side, who presented the golden vessel, filled with English wine. He sipped the draught and returned the cup to his kneeling slave without so much as noticing her.

A merry laugh from the lips of the Queen relieved the

awkwardness of the scene, as she spoke in good English and said: "Thou hast come to me at last, thou of my mark; welcome to our strange estate that is a transition between life and death. Thou comest to me in the flesh. As I visit the living in the spirit, art thou incredulous? Look around thee. What thou seest may vanish before thine eyes and be as the dust of the desert."

He was confused at this strange manner of speech. "I am bewildered, thou gloriously beautiful woman. This is a land of mysteries where everything is unreal. I come, O thou strange ruler, that this letter may be removed, that hath brought to me woe only. Where, O Queen! hast thou the English manner of speech? I marvel that thou speaketh so well."

"Wot ye not that Dantima is under the potency of my spell. Thou didst enter the charmed circle, and thou hast come into thy kingdom. I am thy queen, thou art my king. The stars have so marked it on the dial of time. Thy horoscope is my horoscope. Love's power hath banished space and here thou art. Hadst thou not killed my slaves that I sent to conduct thee hither, how many weary miles hadst thou shortened? For ages have I thus lived, neither an inhabitant of the earth nor a spirit in space. Thy coming will free me from this strange existence. Dost thou wonder that thy presence bringeth joy to me?"

Sir Jasper knew not how to answer this declaration of love that brought sorrow to Callisto's heart.

Seeing that she looked intently at Callisto, he coughed violently and motioned to his slave to approach. Upon her knees Callisto presented her companion with the preparation that was English wine. He knew that the Koran prohibited the use of wine; for this reason he used

the liquor, that the wily Mohammedans might be thoroughly deceived.

With a haughty wave of his hand, he dismissed his attendant, who thereupon retired six paces and stood at a respectful attention. Turning to Callisto, Sir Jasper exclaimed: "This is a slave that I purchased in Alexandria. She hath a great knowledge of the healing art, and hath the secret of herbs that is wonderful. My life dependeth upon her skill, as thou hast seen.

"Give me, I pray thee, thy good offices, that this cursed letter be removed from my breast; then will I make my devotions to Allah for thee. This strange character that none knew of in England hath brought me only sorrow and miles of weary travel."

"Call not the sign cursed, else thou hast the full measure of our displeasure. The astrologer told thee of its meaning, how then can it be that I have the power to remove it, since the stars tell their eternal story and thou standeth before the fulfillment of their promise."

"I pray thee, Most Gracious Queen, to hasten the time that I may stand in the shadow of sparkling Venus lest the influence should be a waning power, and eight weary years come and go ere the chance cometh to me again."

"Be thou not uneasy; thou hast yet eight full moons ere the time be come. I cannot say to thee nay, for a higher power hath decreed that the character shall be removed. I will send a thribble score of Mamelukes to the oasis, that they may bring thee to me again. Didst thou see the height of the wall that surrounds my palace? Thou wilt never escape. I am the Priestess of the Sun. Go to thy rest now, for thou art wearied with thy long journey."

These visitors of the desert retired as courteously as they entered. When they came to their apartments Sir

Jasper fell into a melancholy mood. The far-away shores of Old England, with their tender memories, came to him just as so many mocking ghosts would come. Thus dreaming, he slept. He could hear the melody of a hundred harps as the moments sped by. Was he again in the great city of Petra, with its teeming population. When he awoke, Callisto was waving a superb fan over his face; a fan of peacock feathers, bordered with ostrich plumes.

"Callisto," he said, "was I dreaming the music of the harps came to me again? Did my soul leave my body for the nonce? Did I selfishly sleep, and thou weary? Sleep thou in thy turn and I will wave the strange eyes that have a golden setting in the feathers."

"Nay, not so, thou light of my eyes, unless thou wouldst have me torn from thy side forever. I liked not the cruel look that came into the eyes of yon Queen. She hath a jealous heart. For this reason thou must play the part of a cruel master. The music of the harps cameth from the musicians that are hidden behind yon embroidered tapestry. Speak thou in a low tone of voice. The Queen may catch the meaning of thy speech; then what availeth thy purposes?"

A full six months drifted by. The luxury that surrounded them surfeited Sir Jasper, who would have yielded it all for a good English meal. The travelers marveled at this strange people that idled eternity away in a most profligate manner. They had no bazaars within the palace walls; no trading, no commerce. Yet was the wealth fabulous. Want was unknown. They had no devotions, but bowed to the images of entwined serpents that were everywhere. The thought came to the imprisoned nobleman that this beautiful woman was the original Eve, and the spot the site of the Garden of Eden.

The lack of living force made them act like automatons that had no souls.

The Queen had thus far made little advance in her wooing. She sat with him for hours and never tired of listening to the descriptions of the manners and customs of his native land. The approach of winter and the formation of ice and snow was a revelation to her. The solemn music that was wafted from Dantima made her shudder. An illy defined dread made her wish that the trip to the oasis was ended. Much to the nobleman's relief, she made preparations for the journey. Yet was she minded to keep Callisto as a pledge of his return.

She did this to prove the love that Sir Jasper had for his slave. A look from Callisto warned him. By this sign he made answer that he made no objection to this arrangement. Yet he explained to her that her presence was an assurance of his health, which the Queen, by reason of a previous interview, well understood. This last point gained, they made speedy arrangements to leave on the morrow.

The wanderers of the desert again found themselves standing in the shadow of the great wall. The sun was on the eastern side.

Sir Jasper was superbly mounted upon a black Arabian steed, whose well-groomed sides glistened in the rays of the sun like so much jet. His belongings were securely strapped behind him. Callisto rode by his side. Ample provision for their wants had been made. Guided by the compass, they made a good day's journey and rested for the night under the ample Arabian tents, that gave them great comfort.

The soldiers conversed in an unknown tongue. Yet did they keep vigilant watch over their prisoner as day

by day shortened the distance between the nobleman and the oasis where the fatal letter was to be removed. Sir Jasper thought until his head ached of some plan whereby he might elude the vigilance of his guards, who had never heard a gun fired. It is true they handled these firearms, yet did they not know of their use.

The troop was fatigued by the sandy stretch of desolation that was now behind them. They were on the caravan routes where another danger threatened them. The fierce Bedouins swarmed on this part of the trail. Thus far they met with none of these robber bands. Sir Jasper with his spy-glass observed the oasis ahead of him. Turning to Callisto, he said: "By the morrow in the afternoon we will be in the shade of its trees, and yet no means of our deliverance suggests itself to me."

Allah mercifully influenced their escape. He saw with his telescope the Bedouins approach. They came like the breath of the wind. The wide circle drew nearer. The cowardly Mamelukes were terror stricken as the swift arrows of the foemen whistled about their ears. Their scimitars were useless. Consequently they fled in every direction, pursued by these terrible savages. Fully a score of them galloped straight towards the Englishman and his companion. It was the effort of a moment to unsling his gun and shoot down the foremost leader. The atmosphere was in that peculiar condition where the report of the gun had a hundred echoes.

The robbers gave a great shout of dismay and galloped away. Thus the two were alone with the oasis near to them. Sir Jasper gazed stupidly at the brave girl who was wounded by an arrow. He rushed hurriedly to her side. She fell into his arms as one that was dead. In his rage he shook his fist at the south where the Bedouins had

disappeared, and bended over the dying Callisto, whose life was ebbing away. He muttered in anguish:

"Thou mortally wounded, and I knew it not. Thou didst not cry out with the pain. Merciful God! how can I lose thee now, and the victory won. My soul is rent with sorrow."

"It is the will of Allah. Oh! my beloved, all of the happiness that my poor life ere knew was passed in thy company. Nay, do not put me from thee, hold me steadfastly in thy arms that the last flicker of my breath may pray for thee. Kiss my lips while they are yet warm, that the last love light of my eyes may light thy journey to thy home. I will be with thee always in the spirit. When thou hearest the whiz of an arrow and the twang of a bow string, then will I stand by thy side; the touch of my hands will soothe thee."

Then said the dying girl no more. She was dead. In his grief he noted not the passing of the shadow of the star, yet felt he the strange character come away from his breast. The torment of a lifetime was removed. The joy he felt was sanctified by the death of Callisto. He buried her in the ruins and gathered he a great pile of stones, which he heaped upon her tomb, that the hyenas might not rob him of the empty casket from which the jewel had been taken.

With the provisions that Callisto had so thoughtfully provided, he rode fiercely away. The superior mettle of his Arabian horse carried him fast and far on his journey to Alexandria. A score of dangers beset him. Yet did the gun with its loud detonations frighten the Bedouins. Guided by the needle of the compass, he reached the bungalow on the shore of Gulf of Suez. Here he rested for the space of three days, crossed the Isthmus,

and reached Alexandria, where he was recognized, but the absence of the blazing letter saved his life. Yet was he imprisoned in the dungeon with all of its filth and darkness. His gold that Callisto had saved stood in the place of a friend. He was liberated. Without loss of time he boarded an Italian vessel bound for Rome. No further adventure coming to him, he landed in the Eternal City. The English colony had broken up. For this reason he hurriedly embarked for England.

He arrived in London almost penniless, friendless and unknown. Some strange impressment came to him as he trudged on foot to Dantima. The whiz of an arrow startled him as he sat by the highway in the shade. The thought came to him that some bold archer was sending a shaft in his direction. He felt that some subtle influence was by his side; an influence that came as a premonition. Then a new idea dawned upon his brain.

It was yet a half score of leagues to Dantima. The mind came to him to rest for the night in the woods and reach the burgh by noon of the following day; yet was he so impressed by the influence of Callisto's presence that he walked all night, and reached the gateway just as the sun was rising. Even while he halted the gate swung backwards upon its hinges, and without questioning any one he met he went straightway to the monastery.

Most of his brothers had been transferred elsewhere or had passed away; yet was Father Leonard spared to him. Right joyful was the greeting that he received from this aged abbot, whose form was bent with age, whose memory was vivid and clear. When the embraces were come to an end Sir Jasper eagerly asked: "Doth Florette still live? If she liveth, then is she married?" The smile on his companion's face brought happiness to his heart. The

benevolent features that pity truthfully stamped with its own seal was abeam with happiness.

"Nay, my son, be thou not downcast. She whom thou lovest liveth; yet is her heart sorrowful for the misfortune of her mother. Thrice the maiden had wed Carl but for the malice of the sister of the mother who cried in a loud voice: 'I forbid this marriage!' Yet is Florette's heart true to thee. Thou gavest us a fright. Thy soul person came to us disguised as a heathen Turk. It is yet early; they at the cliff are not risen. Tell to me the strange happening."

Rapidly the traveler related the visit to Petra, and the history of the strange old man with the robe of black, covered with the letters of silver that adorned his person. "'Tis passing strange that that thou relatest. Go to her, I will not detain thee, my son, and may heaven's blessing rest upon thee and the maiden."

"Nay, not so, my father; I wish not for a repetition of the letter that brought me such woe and gave to me miles of weary travel. Go thou and tell her that someone wisheth speech with her."

"It will not be necessary, my son, she will be at the grotto for her confessions. Thou forgetteth that these old legs have not the strength to bear me hence; the pathway is rugged and steep.

"Get thee away, the maiden is e'en now awaiting the coming of a brother monk. Break the news to her gently, for sorrow hath made but a sorry mending of her nerves. Stay! I must tell thee that her mother is even now in prison on the charge of murder. God sent thee in time; away to the glen quickly."

He had the sacred robes of his priesthood on him, yet lacked his gait that dignity that befitted his calling.

When he had come near to the presence of Florette she marveled greatly at the length of his step and wondered at the haste that was unseemly. A great wave of love overpowered her; she leaned against the rocks that formed the grotto and placed one hand upon her heart as if to still its tumultuous beating. She could do nothing but hold out the other in a pleading way as she sighed: "Thou hast come to me at last. God has answered my prayer."

There in the silent glen lover and maid clung to each other as if the years were young. "Oh! father lover, how thy coming hath made a smithy's hammer of my heart. The breath cometh to me in pain. Sit here by my side until I feel stronger. Yet thou wearest the cowl and hood, and the letter is gone. Now I bethink me that thou didst show to me the Pope's dispensation in Rome; then why dost thou still cling to the robes?"

" 'Twas the wish of Father Leonard. He feared the effect of my sudden coming to thee, and thou didst recognize me with it all. How have the years served thee? Tell me briefly, and forget thou the story as thou tellest it, lest sorrow mar the happiness that is ours. Thou hast not changed," he said. "Thy face is still fair to look upon."

"I wonder that it is fair to look upon, for misfortune hath been a constant companion since thy departure. We forfeited the ownership of Ashton Park through the tongue of evil report. Through some irregularity my mother's first marriage could not be proven to the satisfaction of the court. We gave up the property and moved here, where we have lived quietly ever since.

"To continue: As thou knowest, we came hither to find this evidence in yon Custom House. We were partially successful; we found the sailor's kit; the sailor who is

my father; yet was a bundle of letters missing and a gold marriage ring. My mother is even now in the dungeon of Dantima charged with the crime of murder. Her sister chargeth her with poisoning this sailor. For a week hath the testimony gone against my mother; yet is she innocent as an angel from heaven."

"What is thy own father's name? A strange remembrance cometh to me that I will relate to thee when thou hast given me the knowledge that I seek."

"Francis Englebert is his name. His ashes repose in yon old graveyard. We know this, because the ancient parish register so telleth it. His kit is yet in the Custom House."

"'Tis strange, that which thou tellest me. On the banks of the Gulf of Suez an Englishman died whose name is a duplicate of the one that thou givest to me. Didst thou ever see this strangely constructed finger ring? The dying man placed it upon my hand that I might remember to deliver to the proper person the bundle of letters that goeth with it. Hast thou ere cast thine eyes on this bauble before this time?"

"The golden band is not familiar to my eyes. The written characters of the letters on the bauble are well known to me, for the reason that I assisted my brother Nattie to overhaul the evidence he brought hither from the Custom House."

"If this is the package thou seeketh then is my mission a blessing." He said this as he carefully removed each wrapping of oiled skin from the brown and discolored papers and handed the bunch to Florette, who fell to sobbing when her glances rested for a moment on the writing.

"Is it for joy thou weepest?" he said, as he smoothed

the disorder of her locks. "So it seemeth that which appeared to be a misfortune to me was a blessing to thee, since thy mother's honor, nay, even her life, is saved."

"Give these into my keeping, loved of my heart, and thou shalt see justice done and a monstrous wrong righted. Our barrister from London is here, besides other legal lights at the bench. These papers will I place in his hands that he may sift the evidence and make the most of it."

"The hour is twelve. Here have we selfishly mingled happiness and thought not of the joy that awaiteth her that lingereth in duress vile. Go thou to the monastery and await the pleasure of the court. There will I keep thee company, for it paineth me to part from thee for a single moment."

As he moved away she called him and playfully remarked: "Father lover, thou hast forgotten something."

"In good truth, have I overlooked the price of my mission. 'Twas the sorrow of thy mother that absorbed my memory." Saying this, he placed his open hands one on each side of her face and kissed her with reverent sweetness.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE KING'S MESSENGER RETURNS TO DANTIMA.

THE Widow Deycourt was out on bail and forthwith returned to her home.

The ancient town of Dantima had never seen such things, neither had they been invaded by such a great company of gentlefolk from London. Each house was a hostelry where hospitality was dispensed. The legal talent from abroad had given to the case a wide notoriety, hence the multitude that crowded the court was to the discomfort of all.

Upon one side of the room sat the mother of Florette. The widow was seated in the prisoner's dock surrounded by those that loved her. The lines of grief had settled with a subdued grace upon her gentle features. Her modest bearing made friends in the audience. A quiet hush was over all, even the breathing of the spectators was audible as the Justice of the Commonwealth's bench brought the gavel down with a low rap on the arm of his great chair.

The judge ran his glances over the assemblage. There was a kindly expression on his face that set forth from the wig and silken gown like unto the pictures one sees in halls of justice. With a great flourish of authority the cryer bawled: "In Cromwell's name I now declare this court duly opened for such business as may come before it."

The justice, in a kindly though firm voice, demanded: "Prisoner at the bench, what sayest thou, guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty, your honor." She said this in a manner that brought forth from the audience a burst of applause which was instantly checked by sharp raps from the gavel.

The barristers sat on opposite sides of a long table and methodically arranged their briefs. The low hum of conversation between them was interrupted by the Commonwealth's prosecutor who asked the first witness:

"What is thy name? and where dost thou reside?"

"My name is Anna Englebert. I am a sister to the murdered man. I reside in London."

"Why dost thou bring this terrible accusation? Is not yon prisoner thy sister by marriage? According to these papers thou chargeth her with poisoning her own husband. What was the motive for the crime?"

"That which thou asketh I know not. It is the evidence that she gave him arsenic that I wish to introduce." Saying this she produced the porcelain box from the folds of her silk bodice and handed it to the Comonwealth's prosecutor; then she readjusted her Elizabethian ruffle and sat down.

"Suppose this is arsenic, what proof hast thou that the Widow Deycourt administered this fatal drug to her husband?"

"The drug that is in the box came from the stomach of the dead man; the part that remaineth was found in the possession of the accused." The prisoner at the bench arose, and with gentle dignity exclaimed: "Thy speech is as false as thy miserable heart." Having delivered herself of this answer she sank back in her seat and wept. This interruption created some confusion, which the Chief Justice promptly silenced and said: "Let the testimony proceed."

"Thou hast not answered my interrogatory. I will repeat my request. 'What proof has thou that the Widow Deycourt administered this fatal drug to her husband?' " When he had so spoken his keen gray eyes looked intently on her face.

This disconcerted the witness for a moment. Then, as if she had made some mental resolution, she answered: "My sister, Ella Oakley, told me this."

"Upon such testimony thou hast brought this terrible arraignment. Where is thy sister that she may testify? The Commonwealth must be satisfied in this matter of evidence."

"She liveth on the border of Scotland, three days' good journey hence. I would that she were here, for I knew not so many tangling questions would be asked me. I like not this vexatious parleying."

"My good woman, the life of yon gentle woman is trembling in the balance."

"Your honor, may it please thee to adjourn this bench until this evidence is forthcoming; my deputies have acted hastily without sifting the truth."

When the court was adjourned officers of the law were sent post haste to summons the aforesaid Ella Oakley. Carl thereupon mounted his animal; by nearer routes he gained a day on the deputies and reached the cottage that had sheltered him in former times. He found his aunt and informed her of the criminal proceedings that had been instituted against the Widow Deycourt.

"Tell to me, my aunt, if thou knowest that Florette's mother administered the arsenic that killed her first husband? Four deputies are even now on the way hither to bring thee to court in Dantima. My relative that makes the charge said that she had this evidence from thee."

"Oh! Carl, hath she done this ungodly thing? I am undone if they bring me thither, because I know it only by hearsay. Thy aunt, the duchess, told me this; I know not if it be true."

"Auntie, this is distressing. I came to warn thee. Thy answer giveth me pain. Nay! nay! thou canst not fly to Scotland; it is too late. I could kill myself for the disgrace that is upon us. Oh! this foolish old woman, better a thousand times that she had died."

The deputies came up at a sharp trot and served the papers upon the woman. The two females would have sought the protection of the secret passages, but Carl persuaded them to mount and ride to Dantima, which place they reached without further delay.

The bench resumed its sittings promptly. Ella Oakley was in the witness box pale with fear and anxiety. The calm, cold voice of the prosecutor asked her: "Thy name is Ella Oakley, so I am informed. What proof hast thou to bring before his honor that the prisoner gave her late husband arsenic?"

"Sir," she said with a trembling voice, "I know it only from hearsay. My cousin, the duchess, that formerly owned Ashton Park, stated as much to me. This is all that I know of the case."

The Commonwealth's prosecutor raised his right hand and silence was in the temple of justice. "May it please your honor to issue a warrant for the appearance of the duchess. The law must be vindicated."

Ella Oakley thereupon arose and answered in this wise: "The lady thou wouldst summon hither has been gone for years; I know not whether she be living or whether she be dead."

An awkward silence came upon the court. The mill of

justice ceased to grind. The prosecutor fumbled with the papers before him, and then called the accuser to the stand. "My good woman, I say good woman because thou hast thy Book of Holy Writ with thee, who furnished thee with the contents of this box? and who held the post-mortem examination?"

"A chemist from London, and may it please thee, I have since that time had the contents of the box analyzed."

"Where liveth the chemist that first analyzed this half-digested food; we will summon him at once that this Commonwealth may not be at further expense."

"Alas, sir! he has passed away long since. Hast thou not the certificate of this fact before thee? Thou hast also the legal proof that the post-mortem examination was duly held."

"My good woman, upon examining these documents, I find that they are not legally correct. The seal is wanting, and the witnesses to the signatures are non-residents of England. The notary hath not affixed his name in legal form, for this reason thy evidence is worthless."

The iron nerves of the stately dame were not affected by this information as she replied: "Call to the stand the alchemist of Dantima. He liveth and will corroborate that which I have stated."

Carl's father came forward, and with his son's help ascended the low steps that placed the chemist before the bench. The Commonwealth's examiner looked dubiously at this witness whose unkempt locks and neglected person bespoke one who had studied deeply. "Tell me, my good man, didst thou examine the contents of this porcelain box?"

"Truly did I do so. By three tests found I arsenic

enough mixed with the half-digested food to kill four men. This is the same box that hath the peculiar markings on the lid. I cannot be mistaken."

"Who brought this to thee, aged man, that it might be analyzed? Hast thou a license or commission from the late King Charles or from the Lord Protector of England to carry on such a business?"

"The accuser who sitteth yonder. I asked for no license because my investigations go forward in a different line. It is true that chemistry is the groundwork of my alchemy that is of myself and by myself and for myself. I thus interfere with no man's calling."

"What effect would this deadly drug have in the preservation of the tissues of a dead body? To make my question plainer, would the poison keep the corpse from decaying?"

"The poison would most certainly arrest the decay of the tissues of such a body. The lapse of years would make no difference."

"This is all that thou knowest of this case, then stand aside."

"Had I known that this evidence was obtained for evil intent it had not gone from my laboratory."

Then followed the testimony for the defense of the prisoner.

Nattie was placed in the witness box. The counselor from London thus questioned the young man: "Hast thou seen these papers before this day of thy mother's trial?"

"Yes, sir; for two years I sought for them in the Custom House of Dantima. I found the kit of a sailor who is my step-father; yet did I not find the certificate of my mother's marriage to this sailor, yet found I the parish

register in the ruins of the ancient chapel in the graveyard that surmounts the hill."

"Is this the parchment that giveth the date of the marriage? if so, make a display that the jury may see the record."

The prosecutor arose and objected: "Your honor, this hath little to do with this criminal charge; rather should the civil courts accept such evidence."

"Your honor, I wish to show a motive for this murder that hath been unjustly fastened upon my client. This ancient dame hath said that my client and her husband were not legally married. Now, why did she say such a thing? Simply because the Widow Deycourt inherited Ashton Park through her first husband, who was lawfully seized of the same. If they were not legally wedded then had my client no just title to the property.

"Further, I have an idea that the duchess is the criminal. I make this assertion because, in examining the papers that placed my client in possession of Ashton Park, I found forgeries in the signatures and other irregularities that made me doubt the honesty of her purposes."

This testimony being admitted as evidence, the counselor continued: "Show to these gentlemen of the jury a plat of the graveyard; place thy finger on record where he, the dead sailor, is buried." Turning to the twelve men that had the life of the widow in their custody, he said: "Why should this poor woman wish to take the life of her husband? It is true that he had a roving disposition and was fond of adventure. This fact does not prove that they lived unhappily together. Again, the prosecution hath not brought forward a single particle of evidence to prove that my client committed the deed.

It is to be deplored that this widow's life should be a continuous series of misfortunes because the tongue of evil report hath belied her."

The prosecutor answered this harangue to the jury thus:

"These papers prove nothing. Produce the marriage certificate. The fact that this dead seaman was a rover should prove to any reasonable mind that his home life was not happy."

"Your honor, I will not only prove that the married life of this prisoner and her first husband was exceptionally happy, but I will also prove that Francis Englebert died in a foreign land. Let the bailiff issue a writ for the appearance of Sir Jasper X——. The officer of the law will find the person at the monastery in Dantima."

At the mention of this name Carl, the alchemist's son, would have fallen from his seat, but with that fortitude that courage upbuildeth he drank from the tankard a full draught of spring water and wiped the beads of moisture from his forehead. The moisture that cometh not with heat, but the moisture that cometh from nervousness. For this reason, when the nobleman entered the court room, Carl's calmness returned, and thus musing he noted the altered appearance of the erstwhile King's messenger.

The tint of the traveler's skin was a healthy tan color. The hot winds of the desert had removed that effeminate whiteness that luxury produced. His inches seemed taller. The cut of his doublet and hose was not changed, yet were the colors more subdued. The moustache was heavier and darker; altogether he was a manly appearing man, who was handsome in person and courteous in his manner.

When he was duly sworn he recounted the strange meeting with one of his countrymen in that far-off land. He described minutely the deathbed scene, and handed to the counselor the bundle of letters and the gold ring, which this same counselor passed over to the foreman of the jury with this remark: "Your honor, I do this to uphold the sanctity of a private correspondence. While there is naught that the most sensitive might blush at, yet as a mark of respect to this gentle woman, I would that your honor would make a ruling in accordance herewith."

The prosecutor for the Comonwealth handed to Sir Jasper a miniature portrait of Francis Englebert and queried: "Did the features of the person that thou callest Francis Englebert have a close resemblance to the features of this picture. Turn thy face to the jury."

"The resemblance is wonderfully true."

The witness continued his account of the last wishes of the dying man. Again was he cross-questioned by the prosecutor, who asked:

"Didst thou read these papers, Sir Jasper? And if thou didst not, what reason hast thou to believe that it is in the handwriting of the deceased?"

"The prisoner hath full knowledge of the fact. It seemeth that this is the package that was missing from the seaman's kit."

Sir Jasper was in sore straits at these questionings. Turning to the stern accuser of innocence, he said: "Methinks yon stately dame that sitteth in judgment on her sex should know her own brother's script. If it is his honor's ruling let the writing be displayed that the jury may be convinced."

No objection being had the letters were placed in the

hands of the widow's accuser for inspection. In a clear, cold voice she replied to the interrogatory of the judge: "I am free to state that this is the handwriting of my brother." Then a great trembling seized her. She could not further say anything but straightway sat down.

Sir Jasper, who was looking at Florette, arose and spake to his honor in this wise: "If Francis Englebert died in a foreign land, how is it that his body lieth in yon ancient graveyard. There is some strange mystery here that needeth unraveling. Again, if the Widow Deycourt poisoned her husband, how is it that he roamed so far with such a dose of this fatal drug in his stomach? Let the remains that lie interred on the hill be exhumed; then will this trial be brought to a speedy ending."

The nobleman's words produced a profound sensation in the court room. By agreement of counsel the chief justice of the Commonwealth's bench adjourned the regular sitting to the following day. The grave-diggers were summoned. The assembly came together at the grave that Nattie pointed out. It was a solemn moment in the lives of the accuser and the accused. Every eye was fixed on the sexton and his assistants, as they quickly dug down to the coffin that was in a remarkable state of preservation, being of cedar wood that hath not the germs of decay in its structure. Many doubted that they would see a trace of the corpse, yet the words of the alchemist intensified the abnormal curiosity until it was satisfied by the removal of the rusted plate that shielded the glass.

The alchemist was right. The face of the corpse was strange to the accused, yet was it in a sound state of preservation. The widow, whose heart was innocent, looked calmly on the face of the dead, although she knew

that a hundred curious glances were seeking for an acknowledgment of guilt in her face. Then spake the judge: "Tell us, thou accuser, who this man is that no one knoweth?"

She of the high Elizabethian collar and stately mien advanced to the supports whereon the coffin lay and gave one startled glance at the countenance beneath the glass casing and exclaimed:

"Oh, my God! how have I wronged this woman!" Then fell she over as one that is dead. She moved not a muscle for the space of a score of minutes. When they saw the blood oozing from her mouth then knew they that she had departed this life with the false accusation upon her soul. No one would touch the yet warm body of this woman until the sweet voice of the widow admonished them of that human charity that forgiveth the wayward. Then added she: "If I forgive the fallen woman this great wrong that she hath done me, why shouldst thou not do likewise. God is sitting in judgment on her soul. Say I, peace to her ashes."

After saying this gentle speech the stalwart browned men of Dantima would have carried her (the accused) on their shoulders through the burgh, but as the law must perforce be complied with, the court, in a procession, wended its way back to the court room, where the judge reopened the case as speedily as possible. The jury returned a verdict of "not guilty," as charged, and the justice added: "Go thy way, thou art most honorably discharged from custody. Let the writ so issue," and the court adjourned.

The notoriety was painful to the widow, which the crowd seeing, respectfully stood aside while she who had been accused of murder passed out to seek the quietness

of the cottage on the Devil's Elbow. Florette was all smiles and tears. They chased over her expressive face like the showers of an April day. She and her hero lover halted at the foot of the pathway. He dared not risk the penalty of a second adventure. Without telling any one of his mission he wended his way to the laboratory of the alchemist and got he permission to burn the volume of ancient lore after first replacing the leaves that he drew from his doublet.

Then went he into the forest and builded a fire of dry fagots, whereon he laid the book and waited until it was consumed by the flames. Never had Dantima heard such strange noises. The very elements seemed to run riot. There were hissing and moaning sounds; such sounds as come from a million lost souls. The whir of unseen wings was in the air. The troubling of the waters in the bay for the space of an hour terrified those of Dantime, and all was still.

He sat down upon a rock to think. The whiz of an arrow came distinctly to his ears, and a sweet voice that seemed to come from everywhere spake:

"I will be with thee always, thou light of my eyes. When thou hearest the flight of the phantom arrow come to me in all thy solitude and spend an hour with me. I begrudge thee not the love of the maiden who hath suffered greatly at thy absence, but forget her not who was thy companion in all of the dangers that beset thee."

Then spake he: "Callisto, be it as thou wisheth. I will religiously heed thy request. If thou seest into my soul thou art satisfied." The far-away answer came: "I am satisfied. Haste! Thy love awaiteth thee at the foot of the hill. The strange noises have terrified her."

When he had come into the presence of Florette she

questioned him as to his absence. "Sit here by my side, I have a marvelous tale to relate that bordereth on the miraculous. Dost thou remember how eagerly I sought the laboratory of the alchemist, that his antique lore might explain to me the letter? He hath a volume of Arabic astrology. This has been the cause of all the ghostly happenings in Dantima, which same coming to the ears of these sturdy burghers might bring sorrow to the father of Carl. For this reason have I just come from the burning thereof."

She sat as one in a dream as he followed up one adventure with another. He kept nothing back from her, but dwelt lovingly upon the faithfulness of his youthful rescuer. Having finished, he awaited for her answer that came speedily:

"Nay! not one particle of jealousy entereth my heart. Hadst thou brought her to England 'twould have been the same. My love for thee is not measured by such feelings. Since the danger to thee is a thing of the past, follow me to the cottage where a warm welcome is thine."

The King's messenger was as one of the now happy family that dwelt in peace on the Devil's Elbow. While preparations for the marriage were going forward he absented himself for a season that he might look up belongings he once owned. Gifts from the hand of King Charles, consisting of moneys that were due; his property thus he recovered after the lapse of so many years. It proved a competency that was ample for all of his earthly wants. The wedding was so quietly conducted that few in Dantima were present. Thus the lives of these reunited lovers flowed onwards in one continual stream of happiness.

The mystery of the grave on the hill was a nightmare to Carl that deepened as the days went by.

He had no stomach for food, consequently his frame fell away. He became a restless mortal. His sleep came to him by fitful turns that made him morose. He saddled his animal and rode straightway to the border to learn from the lips of the Oakleys the secret that had brought so much misfortune to them all. They welcomed him with a right good grace. When he had imparted to them the object of his mission they said:

"Why should I tell to thee that which will bring sorrow to thy heart; yet if thou insisteth I shall tell thee all."

"Give me the truth, though it killeth me. I have been the football of fortune for these many years, stumbling where I should walk uprightly. Begin thou, the suspense fevereth me."

Saying which he seated himself by the side of his aunt and listened intently as she spake:

"There were three sisters of our family. Two of these were thy aunts and one was thy mother. Francis Englebert was our brother, and an only son, who, by inheritance and the laws of entailment, owned Ashton Park. The duchess, who is thy mother, bruited it about that Florette's mother was a mistress instead of a wife. Your real mother brought suit to dispossess the Widow Deycourt of this property. That the edict of King Charles confirmed the duchess he did this the more readily because the rightful owner was of a roving disposition that restraint could not curb.

"The duchess poisoned her husband, who was your lawful father. A father of whom thou mayest be proud. He was a just man though plain in his manner of speech, and plainer in his manner of dress. The guilty slander

she hatched sat heavily on his heart. So much so, that he would have betrayed her. For this reason she poisoned him and had him buried in yon grave in Dantima. Florette's father being long absent, she placed the name of Francis Englebert upon the tombstone and had it so entered on the church register. Then straightway accused the widow of murdering Francis Englebert. Thy aunt, hearing of the same, vowed vengeance. Thou knowest the remainder.

"It is strange, Carl, how thou becamest an avenging angel. Thou, in the goodness of thy heart, sought to bring these conflicting elements together. It was the hand of God that vindicated the righteousness of the innocent and cast down the guilty. I would have had thee believe that the alchemist was thy father, and the sweet woman that is his wife was thy mother. Thou knowest all. Blame me not. It was of thy seeking."

"Didst thou, my aunt, know this terrible secret all of these years and remain silent while an innocent woman was so bitterly persecuted?"

The guilty woman hung her head in shame as she answered: "Yes, Carl, I knew it. How bitterly have I repented me of the wrong."

"Then, my aunt, I feel like cursing thee; also my mother and all that had anything to do with this terrible affair." Saying which he rode straightway to Dantima, where he questioned his guardian, her that guided his youthful feet to manhood, but she, knowing naught of the conspiracy, was folded in his arms. From this time to the end of his days he sought the isolation of his father's laboratory and became skilled in the chemist's art.

THE END.

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Treatment Date:
OCT 1996
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